

CIVILIZING (THE) CHIEFS: ISLAM AND INDIRECT RULE IN THE NORTHERN  
TERRITORIES OF THE GOLD COAST

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## ABSTRACT

British colonizers relied on chieftaincies as civilizing partners to implement indirect rule in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. A major explanation for the British preference for chieftaincies surrounds how colonizers interpreted recent decades of Muslim intermarriage in the savannah. The arrival of Muslim chiefs to the savannah produced a handful of chiefly led communities. These relatively few groups had loose cultural similarities with European society. The British interpreted the commonalities as signs of human progress in the savannah. Conversely, the British rejected the African communities without Islamic traditions because they did not have recognizable or centralized forms of political leadership. Furthermore, depicting non-chiefly groups as wildly different from European society reinforced the modern and progressive identity of Britain while simultaneously representing non-chiefly groups of the protectorate as socially static or infantile. Believing in the superiority of Muslim-based chieftaincies and the inferiority of non-chiefly groups reflected the Orientalist literary depiction the British began in travel and diplomatic correspondence from and about the savannah. This early intelligence gathering from the nineteenth century produced vivid judgments about the relative value of chiefly and non-chiefly communities for colonizers. The British saw the existence of Muslim-derived chieftaincies as proof that Africans required outside intervention to experience change. Consequently, the view justified British imposition and the civilizing mission. This thesis examines a variety of interlocking British documents—travel and diplomatic literature, colonial administrative reporting, and early anthropological studies—to highlight the positive British discourse representing chiefly groups of the Northern Territories.

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## 1. Introduction

The British relied on chieftaincies as civilizing partners to implement indirect rule in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. A major explanation for the British preference for chieftaincies surrounds how colonizers interpreted recent decades of Muslim intermarriage in the savannah. The arrival of Muslim chiefs to the savannah produced a handful of chiefly led communities. These relatively few groups had loose cultural similarities with European society. The British interpreted the commonalities as signs of human progress in the savannah. For example, the colonizers thought chieftaincies were politically centralized communities. They were united by the paramount authority of a chief who ruled as first among equals with kinship heads and other headmen. They were literate, produced textiles, appeared monotheistic, seemed to be individual landowners, controlled regional trade networks, and possessed civil servants and highly organized military structures. Conversely, the British rejected the African communities without Islamic traditions because they did not have recognizable or centralized forms of political leadership. Furthermore, depicting non-chiefly groups as wildly different from European society reinforced the modern and progressive identity of Britain while simultaneously representing non-chiefly groups of the protectorate as socially static or infantile.

Believing in the superiority of Muslim-based chieftaincies and the inferiority of non-chiefly groups reflected the Orientalist literary depiction the British began in travel and diplomatic correspondence from and about the savannah. These early intelligence reports from the nineteenth century produced vivid judgments about the relative value of chiefly and non-chiefly communities for colonizers as they occupied and later organized the territory into a civil bureaucracy in 1905. The British saw the existence of Muslim-

derived chieftaincies as proof that Africans required outside intervention to experience change. Consequently, the view justified British imposition and the civilizing mission.

Instead of relying on economic interpretations for colonial rule in West Africa, I argue that British decision-makers ultimately pursued a civilizing mission that aimed at extending modernity overseas. The policy of indirect rule intended to carry out the British civilizing mission through close relationships between colonial officers and African chiefs. The British utilized African authorities to establish institutions and begin development projects intending to produce individual instead of collectivistic self-reflections among African subjects. Africans enlisted in the armed forces; they bought and sold in cash-based markets; they worked as laborers on infrastructure and agricultural sites; they enrolled in primary school; and, by extension, they worked as clerks and assistants in the network of Native Administrations the British created. In engineering these modernizing or civilizing activities, the British built new social arrangements for their African subjects to self-regulate the colonial regime's desire for modernity.

This thesis surveys the influence of British textual knowledge on colonial policy in the Northern Territories in five chapters. As such, the research focuses on British writing about Africans and colonial policy but not necessarily on the experiences of Africans during colonial rule. The present chapter introduces how the representation of chieftaincies reflected the greater civilizing strategy active in British West Africa. By ranking chiefly and non-chiefly groups according to a European standard of human advancement, the British imagined chiefly groups, which displayed distinguishing Islamic histories and centralized governments, as superior to the non-chiefly groups of the savannah.

The second chapter couches British optimism with chieftaincy in a longstanding assumption or myth of the interior produced in a series of influential travel and diplomatic publications. The early writing on the West African savannah, an area previously unseen by the British, offered vivid imaginaries of a Muslim dominated north that seemed to identify chieftaincies like the Dagomba and Gonja as powerful Islamic kingdoms. Chapter three analyzes the first decades of Annual Reports from the Northern Territories to illustrate why the British shifted from a military occupation to a civil administration of their newest protectorate. These years offer the clearest picture of the contradictory aims of the civilizing mission in the savannah. These included how indirect rule, a system that utilized native authorities for colonial control, began a process with the main goal of eradicating African custom and tradition. Despite this paradox, the administration rehearsed its confidence in chieftaincy as a marker of progress and continued to support and fabricate chiefly rulers throughout the protectorate. The fourth chapter highlights the rise of anthropological scholarship and how the British used anthropological studies to attempt to confront the problem a generation of government-made chiefs introduced to the administration. The British remained optimistic about chieftaincy into the 1930s but began to recognize that the lack of authentic chiefly representatives in the savannah, which meant the transport of savannah youth to the south, better fulfilled the aims of the civilizing mission.

### The Historical Record

This thesis examines a variety of interlocking British documents—travel and diplomatic literature, colonial administrative reporting, and early anthropological studies—to highlight the positive British discourse representing chiefly groups of the Northern Territories. The British admiration for chieftaincy began as an interpretation



about the positive influence of Muslim intermarriage on the political and spiritual life of the savannah. Examining the British intelligence about the savannah before the Northern Territories became annexed to the Gold Coast in 1902 showed that the Colonial Office targeted powerful Muslim kingdoms or empires to establish treaty agreements as a means to expand their power against European rivals.

For instance, the travel accounts by Gold Coast emissaries Thomas Bowdich (*Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee*, 1817), Joseph Dupuis (*Journal of A Residence in Ashantee*, 1824), and Henry Barth (*Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa, Vol. III*, 1858) were key in naming the Dagomba and Gonja as supposedly powerful Emirates with connections to the trading network centered at Timbuktu.

Operating in the savannah under this assumption several decades later, another Gold Coast agent, George Ekem Ferguson, quickly indicated that instead of Emirates, the previous intermarriage of itinerant Muslim traders in previous centuries established only a few chiefly kingdoms but no Emirates similar to those in neighboring Nigeria. More importantly, Ferguson's writing established the precedent of viewing chiefly group as culturally distinct from, and as a result, superior to the typically non-chiefly communities that dotted the savannah. The writings of Ferguson were particularly instructive about the British ability to reconfigure the self-reflections of an African colonial subject. His correspondence might be one possible proof about the effectiveness of the civilizing mission. Ferguson's writing clearly shows his profound internalization of the British progressive or stratified view of humanity by continually referring to the progress of Britain northward as the progress of "our" civilization among the "barbarians".

The administrative reporting from a range of chief and district commissioners

stationed in the Northern Territories between 1902 and 1927 demonstrated the deepening British confidence in chiefs as African partners in the civilizing mission. British commissioners became armchair ethnographers as the Colonial Office sought out the paramount authorities over a diverse tribal landscape. The annual reporting contained applause for compliant, seemingly Muslim, and literate in Arabic chiefly societies while offering disdain for resisting, superstitious, and illiterate non-chiefly groups. Similarly, specialized essays and monographs by Commissioners Cardinal (*The Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast*, 1920), Eyre-Smith (*A Brief Review of the History and Social Organization of the Peoples of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast*, 1933), and Lugard (*The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 1922) all revered chieftaincies because their Muslim ancestry produced centralized politics, balance between secular and spiritual institutions, and monotheism. The few ethnographic surveys in the 1920s from the protectorate and the yearly administrative summaries noted how the progress of infrastructure, law and order, and education went faster in chiefly led communities while the non-chiefly groups in the NE Province continually evaded British control. The reports also rehearsed the relative superiority and inferiority of chiefly and non-chiefly groups of the savannah. These official writings powerfully created African identities for future readers and emergent specialists in West Africa studies, such as in anthropology

The emergent anthropological studies from the early twentieth century perpetuated the British view that chiefly groups were further along the European path of civilization. While plainly writing to the politicians in the Colonial Office in London, the voluminous research by Ronald Rattray publically aired the mistakes of financially supporting, politically fabricating, and, consequently, thoroughly corrupting, chiefly

rulers in the savannah. Nevertheless, like the earlier colonial ethnographies about the north written by senior field officers, Rattray worked to improve and continue, but never to academically censure or halt the socially disruptive British policy of indirect rule into further, albeit problematized, generations of implementation. Moreover, his studies points out the futility of trying to modernize Africa by bolstering (and mostly fabricating) traditional or unmodern chiefly institutions. Ferguson raised questions about how the Colonial Office might measure success in this strategy, or, what place chieftaincy traditions might have in the desired national arrangement to come.

#### The Partition of Africa, c. 1900

The British confidence in the civilizing process is a useful model for contextualizing the Northern Territories within the early twentieth century division of Africa by European powers. The savannah protectorate represented the apex of British power in the region following their finger-hold of control on the Gold Coast in previous centuries. During the period of partition that followed, Europeans expanded their reach from their coastal fortresses into the interior of the continent and divided large portions of land under their control.<sup>1</sup> While scholars have done much to illustrate how the British increased their economic gains “...by trade and influence if they could; but by imperial rule if they must,” disagreement lingers about the overall British objectives for colonial rule.<sup>2</sup> Some historians situate British imperialism in Africa within the complex of the European trend towards exploitative capitalism and the construction of world systems

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1976), 203; Andrew Cohen, *British Policy in Changing Africa*, (Northwestern: University Press, 1959), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald E. Robinson, John Gallagher, and Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: the Official Mind of Imperialism*, (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1961), 10.

theory.<sup>3</sup> They argue that during the nineteenth century, many influential Britons believed their success in the European economic rivalry hinged on developing their colonies to European standards of civilization.<sup>4</sup> Yet, even economic historians of the British Empire recognize a dilemma in explaining British expansion in West Africa simply along financial lines.<sup>5</sup>

Alone, national economic gains in the intra-European competition for foreign resources are superficial or partial explanations for British rule in the savannah.<sup>6</sup> As Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny expressed throughout their book, *Africa and the Victorians*, British writers in the late-Victorian age placed an array of global cultures upon differing stages of human development according to a standard set by Anglo-European history. The authors argued that the Victorians hoped to push non-Europeans “up the steps of progress which they themselves had climbed.”<sup>7</sup> British colonialism was more than the out-maneuvering of other powers for control over material and raw capital in the fringes of empire. To offer a deeper or more complete explanation for colonial rule, this thesis underscores how the British partition of West Africa fit into the mental imaging of a modern national identity in Europe.

The process of “imagining” a modern self-image hinged on the written comparisons of a corps of “intelligentsias” that directly or indirectly served the British Colonial Office overseas.<sup>8</sup> In the example of British colonialism in West Africa, a range of elites, from British explorer-diplomats to administrator-ethnographers, used the unique

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<sup>3</sup> P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914* (New York: Longman Pub., 1993), 17-19; See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York, 1974).

<sup>4</sup> Ankie Hoogvelt, *Globalisation and the Postcolonial World*, (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Cain and Hopkins, 382.

<sup>6</sup> Juhani Koponen, “The Partition of Africa,” *Nordic Journal of African Studies* Vol. 2 (1983): 126.

<sup>7</sup> Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2003), 140.

history of their country as an inverted mirror to reflect or represent native life in colonies as inferior. Imagining the superiority of chieftaincy as a form of centralized government in part reflected the desirable image of England's own path towards political centralization under the British royals.<sup>9</sup> In other words, this thesis examines what David Scott explained as the “*political rationalities* of colonial power.”<sup>10</sup> The research explores why chieftaincies became what Scott termed the “*targets* of colonial power,” and subsequently how the British constructed chieftaincy as the particular “field” or container for colonial authority.<sup>11</sup>

### A History of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast Colony

Beginning in the seventeenth century, an initial phase of mercantilist activity on European controlled positions prepared the way for the civilizing process to unfold into the savannah. The ongoing British presence on coastal West Africa depended on close relationships with African chiefs. Adventurers from private companies had developed business relationships with middlemen coastal chiefs since the seventeenth century. The first English commercial compacts to the Gold Coast landed in 1618, and the Crown government later assumed full economic and political responsibility over all British trading forts and castles in 1821.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny (1961) submit that historians have ignored examining how the imperialist mind, or “official thinking,” developed during England's long imperialist impulse in the Americas, Asia, India, and Africa: “England's rulers shared an esoteric view of desirable and undesirable trends stretching from the past and present to the future.” 21.

<sup>10</sup> David Scott, “Colonial Governmentality,” 23-49 in *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics*, ed., Jonathan Xavier Inda (Maden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 25.

<sup>11</sup> David Scott, 26.

<sup>12</sup> English government initially administered its outposts from distant Sierra Leone before Cape Coast Castle, a former Swedish fortress, served that role from the shores of the Gold Coast in 1844. Previous to crown control, the African Company of Merchants represented English commercial interests. See Albert van Dantzig, *Forts and Castles of Ghana*, (Hong Kong: Commonwealth Printing, Ltd., 1980), 21, 35, 40, 58-70, 90; F. M. Bourret, *The Gold Coast: A Survey of the Gold Coast and British Togoland, 1919-1946*, (Stanford: University Press, 1949), 23.

A mixture of local political strife and competition with nearby European companies gradually pulled the British into military conflict further inland.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, the British supported coastal chiefs who defied the Ashanti monopoly over inland trade routes to the Europeans.<sup>14</sup> The Ashanti chiefs were the royal class of the Asante Confederacy, the leading African regional power that stretched along the western interior of the Volta river basin in the area roughly equal to the size of present-day Ghana.<sup>15</sup>

After a series of bloody confrontations, British expeditionary forces sacked the Ashanti capital of Kumasi, which dismantled the Asante Confederacy and disenfranchised dozens of chieftaincies of the union. In a bid to consolidate the scattered chieftaincies under the English crown, the British established treaties of protection with many of the chiefs, and instituted the Gold Coast Colony in 1874. Since 1807, Britain failed to negotiate peace over decades of grievances and military action by the Ashanti king concerning his direct control over trade access to the European coastal outposts, bypassing Fante middlemen. From the European perspective, the long dispute threatened local trade and peace, a drama that caused six Anglo-Ashanti Wars and the British, desiring only the status quo, to reluctantly invade and destroy the Ashanti Metropolitan

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<sup>13</sup> Juhani Koponen, "The Partition of Africa," 117; Adu Boahen, et al, *Topics in West African History, New Edition*, (England: Longman Group, 1986), 205.

<sup>14</sup> The feelings of disconnection among distant states in the Asante Confederacy increased their competitiveness over trade routes and their desire for independence from the ruling Ashanti chiefs. Chiefs from Akuampem, Accra, and the fledgling Fante Confederation eventually refused tribute to Kumasi and seized control over trade through Assin and Akyem in 1807. See J. K Fynn, *Asante and Its Neighbours: 1700-1807*, (Northwestern: University Press, 1971), 124, 143, 153; Adu Boahen, et al, *Topics in West African History, New Edition*, 56, 59; Boahen, "Politics in Ghana, 1800-1874, 167-261, 168.

<sup>15</sup> See map, "Asante Empire about 1824," Appendix 1: Throughout this thesis, *Asante* refers to the political federation for which the Ashanti, an Akan speaking ethnic group, produced the leadership that were Paramount Chiefs in Kumasi. Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), 211; K. A. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti* (Oxford University Press, 1951); Ivor Wilks, "Ashanti Government," in *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*, Daryll Forde and P. M. Kaberry, eds., (Oxford University Press, 1969); Thomas J. Lewin, *Asante before the British: The Prempean Years, 1875-1900* (Lawrence, KA: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978).

Region of Kumasi in 1874. Britain previously purchased or seized all the neighboring fortifications built by the Portuguese, Dutch, French, German, Swedish, and the Danish by 1850.<sup>16</sup>

A new Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, led England into an ambitious imperial campaign in West Africa during the late 1890s.<sup>17</sup> The ensuing era of colonial rule and accompanying partition relied on developing institutions and administrations to “organize African society for production and *progress*” to reflect the new modern age.<sup>18</sup> To bring change to the colonies, Chamberlain placed high currency on building infrastructure as a way to spur on a capitalist agricultural economy. Control over Africans was key to this and Chamberlain preferred a centralized colonial regime to either manipulate or remove the tribes.<sup>19</sup>

The British deepened their commitment to West Africa by seeking new territory north of Ashanti and the Gold Coast Colony. Within the space of a few years, the Crown exiled the Asantehene and sent Gold Coast emissary George Ekem Ferguson north into the grasslands in 1896.<sup>20</sup> Ashanti, while still symbolically head of the shattered Asante Confederacy, remained a potent adversary to English forces. With the Asantehene’s deportation, the British sent a powerful signal about their control and supremacy in the region. Building on this superior position, Ferguson signed treaty agreements with a few northern chiefs that provided legal justification against French and German powers

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<sup>16</sup> See Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1975), 243; Adu Boahen, et al, *Topics in West African History, New Edition*, 61, 205; Robinson, Gallagher, Denny, 10; Sir Francis Fuller, *A Vanished Dynasty: Ashanti*, second ed., (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd.: 1968), 51-67, 70; Bourret, 19; W. Walton Claridge, *A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti, Volume Two*, (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1964), 3, 352.

<sup>17</sup> Claridge, 238, 402-414.

<sup>18</sup> Italics mine. Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, 401.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 400.

<sup>20</sup> William Tordoff, *Ashanti Under the Prempehs: 1888-1935*, (London: University Press, 1965), 59-60.

competing for the same territory.<sup>21</sup> The Colonial Office sent Ferguson with the only reconnaissance of the savannah available at the time: seventy-year-old reports that alluded to northern Muslim kings as the dominant force of the savannah. By the turn of the twentieth century, from their initial position on the coastline the British gained military control over hundreds of miles of forest and arable grasslands.<sup>22</sup>

### Modernity and the Control of Chiefs

Colonizers in West Africa envisioned their success in the civilizing mission hinging on advancing at least the veneer of personal freedom for, primarily male, Africans. Individual freedom was necessary in the modern ideal for humans to master themselves and the rest of the natural world. Underscoring this particular view, this thesis responds to what Robert Young expressed in 2001 was the contemporary lack of understanding about the motivations behind the so-called White man's burden of colonialism. In his significant research about colonialism and anti-colonialism, Young suggested that, as a legacy of the Enlightenment, British colonialism was the application of the nineteenth century belief that humans were inevitably led to greater freedom and equality.<sup>23</sup> Culminating in the anthropological studies of the 1930s, a discernible social Darwinist thinking supported nationalist urges towards colonial rule. With the creation of sea charts and printing presses in Europe, imperialist intellectuals became certain that humans divided into so-called advanced and primitive races, with northern Europeans

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<sup>21</sup> These treaties, unlike the treaties of 'protection' Britain sought with the disenfranchised chiefs, were treaties of 'friendship and trade'. David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850-1929*, (Oxford: University Press, 1963), 290.

<sup>22</sup> See map, "Sketch Map of the Gold Coast, Ashanti, and Northern Territories," Appendix 2.

<sup>23</sup> Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 89.



holding first rank.<sup>24</sup> With this conviction, colonizing powers felt inexorably responsible for creating a new, Enlightenment sense of individual freedom and self-reflection upon encountering foreign societies supposedly slave to base human urges. There existed a measure of uniformity in the British approach to their well-intended aims in the colonies. For instance, Michael Crowder compared British aims in West Africa and India, where furthering individual freedom allowed for forms of intimate self-regulation instead of traditional group belonging and ritual.<sup>25</sup> Yet, as this thesis outlines, the British civilizing mission in the Northern Territories depended on establishing diverse forms of control.

Imparting a sense of individuality was essential to modern governance techniques in colonial West Africa. For instance, Michel Foucault underscored how governors institutionalized modern forms of control by focusing on the individual. To Foucault, the aim of modern governance, or “Governmentality,” was to create self-regulating persons that internalize the wider social context.<sup>26</sup> Applying this thinking to governance in the Northern Territories, for example, British administrators hoped to “imbricate” or interconnect individual Africans into new common experiences designed to create a

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<sup>24</sup> L. H. Gann and Peter Duigan, *The Rulers of British Africa, 1870-1914*, (Stanford: University Press, 1978), 262-263, 341-342.

<sup>25</sup> The ability of the British to control and change, for instance, how the colonized viewed and cared for their bodies was a component of the civilizing process. While processes of colonialism closely associate with political and religious actions designed to create autonomous and civilized colonial subjects, the British attempt to establish a modern medical practice and alter self-perceptions of masculinity and health in India fit into the aim to control and ultimately change the self-perception of Indians into a modern self-governing ideal. See Crowder, 211; James Mills, “‘More Important to Civilize than Subdue?’” in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission*, Harald-Fischer Tine and Michael Mann, eds., (London: Wimbeldon Publishing, 2004), 179-190; Paul Dimeo, *Sporting and the ‘Civilizing Mission.’?* in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission*, Harald-Fischer Tine and Michael Mann, eds., (London: Wimbeldon Publishing, 2004), 165-178; David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State, Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*, (California: University Press, 1993); Biswamoy Pati, “‘Ordering’ ‘Disorder’ in a Holy City” in *Health, Medicine, and Empire*, Biswamoy Pati and Mark Harrison, eds., (Hydrabad: Orient Longman, 2001), 270-297; Mark Harrison, “Medicine and Orientalism” in *Health, Medicine, and Empire*, Biswamoy Pati and Mark Harrison, eds., (Hydrabad: Orient Longman, 2001), 37-87.

<sup>26</sup> Foucault argued that the role of modern governance was to employ “techniques” of government designed to infiltrate the minute self-reflections and interests of the population. See Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Essential Foucault*, eds., Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, (New York: The New Press, 2003), 233.

modern self-image.<sup>27</sup> Thus, colonizers believed creating schools, industries, and colonial armed forces would help the British to control and discipline Africans into monitoring themselves and each other in a way that would reflect a new European-ness. Thus, by 1926, in an interesting insight, Governor Guggisberg remarked that British rule in the Gold Coast was changing stereotypically “collectivistic” Africans into modern “individualists.”<sup>28</sup> Embedded in this trend towards creating a new modern individual, the African subjects of colonial rule would internalize the values, attitudes, and strategies determined by colonial rulers to maximize the common wealth and protection of the population.<sup>29</sup> Here, the central contradiction in British strategy emerged when the civilizing mission in the savannah meant forcing individuals to give up their traditions in place of a modern way of life. Yet, local British tactics that supported the principles of indirect rule conversely enshrined and even fabricated traditional rulers to establish colonial authority.

Regional security and personal compliance to British law were the fundamental requirements for colonial law and order. As such, colonial rulers recognized in chiefly zones ready-made environments for civilization when individual chiefs appeared eager to enforce British initiatives. In this way, Mahmood Mamdani contended that the British envisioned the authority structure of the “colonial state as less a territorial construct than a cultural one”.<sup>30</sup> The architecture of power relied upon the British perception of native authorities as a local design for British officers to draft European state structures of control. “The boundaries of culture,” illuminated Mamdani, “would mark the parameters

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<sup>27</sup> Foucault, 235.

<sup>28</sup> The Effect on African Races of Contact with European Civilization, Governor F. G. Guggisberg, Gold Coast Colony, Accra, to Chief Commissioner, N.T., 8 October, 1926, 3a, NRG8/2/7, PRAAD/NR.

<sup>29</sup> Foucault, 241, 243.

<sup>30</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (Princeton: University Press, 1996), 33, 76.

of territorial administration” in the protectorate.<sup>31</sup> At a district level of administration, Mamdani pointed out that the British placed African ethnic groups “under the custody of a Native Authority said to be the rightful bearer and enforcer of an age-old custom and tradition” of political power.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, to enter the minds of individual Africans, British policy-makers sought to preserve traditional authorities presumably as vessels for “eventual self-government.”<sup>33</sup> The colonizers organized the chiefs they controlled into an array of Native Authorities with local legal powers over the various districts of the savannah. African chiefs became gatekeepers into the lives of individual villagers who the British hoped would become the farmers, students, wage earners, and law abiders in a new modern order.

British officials particularly relied upon individual chiefly rulers to help secure the loyalty of the colony on a village or family level. Thus, indirect rule created a body of governor-officials who “ruled by reports” about their varying successes and failures with chiefs and headmen in the Native Authority.<sup>34</sup> The governor-administrators wrote about native progress regarding capitalist food production, wearing cotton clothing, local enrolment in primary education, wage earning on distant infrastructure projects, and service in the colonial military corps. As Foucault illustrated, working to create these personal behaviors and local institutions, governor-administrators hoped to control the lives of their African subjects by redesigning the varying contexts by which individuals envisioned their personal conduct and the behavior of their communities. In practice, the British deployed new agricultural economies, textile use, and wage earning first and

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<sup>31</sup> Mamdani, 79.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>33</sup> Margret Wrong, “The Evolution of Local Government In British African Colonies,” *International Affairs* Vol., 22 No., 3 (1946): 418; Cohen, 30; Crowder, 171, 213.

<sup>34</sup> Nii-K Plange, “The Colonial State in Northern Ghana,” *Review of African Political Economy* No., 31 Capital vs. Labour in West Africa (Dec., 1984), 31, 35.

easiest in chiefly zones, especially after these districts seemed to cooperate quickly and offered little resistance once the British arrived to the area. As becomes clear in the analytical chapters that follow, underpinning the move to develop the savannah was the well-rehearsed practice in Britain of maintaining the superiority of chieftaincy in a written form.

### Orientalism

The superiority of chieftaincy in the minds of the Northern Territories administration was a feature of the long-standing British Orientalist preoccupation with the West African Sudan. At its simplest, Orientalism used knowledge as power to construct the modern European self-image. Appreciating this influential relationship helps understand two ways the positive image of chieftaincy confirmed the primacy of the modern European identity. One explanation for this identity formation championed Muslim chieftaincies as an innovation loosely compared to European-styled progress. The second process of European identity formation occurred along more classic Orientalist lines that contrasted culturally static Africans with evolving Europeans. The British came to recognize that chieftaincy arrived from a Muslim and presumably non-African source. As such, the Islamic influence demonstrated that Africans, unlike Europeans, were incapable of independent change, a key component in the Orientalist construction of non-European inferiority. Furthermore, by highlighting this seeming inability, the British could continually frame so-called pure Africans as primitive representatives of traditional and non-modern society.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Orientalist literature was well established as representing the colonial world as inferior to European civilization. Edward Said contended that Orientalism at its center is a process whereby authors create the modern

self-image as the opposite of traditional societies in Europe's past and throughout Africa, Asia, and India.<sup>35</sup> As Ania Loomba elaborated, Orientalism is a body of knowledge that defines the European image as the inversion of the societies Europeans encountered during their age of exploration and imperial conquest:

Said shows that this opposition is crucial to European self-conception: if colonized people are irrational, Europeans are rational; if the former are barbaric, sensual, lazy, Europe is civilization itself, with its sexual appetites under control and its dominant ethic of hard work; if the [colonized are] static, Europe can be seen as developing and marching ahead.<sup>36</sup>

Hence, Said underscored that European writing created the idea of Europeans as the modern masters of their own destiny by describing non-European societies as infantile and in need of cultural patronage through military occupation and civil administration. A fundamental requirement of the binary process of identity formation is the manifold “configurations of power” that grant the author a position of dominance over her or his subject.<sup>37</sup> From their privileged vantage point, Orientalist authors used a “culturally hegemonic” form of authority and self-reference in their writing about the non-European Other.<sup>38</sup> For example, British administrators in the African savannah benefited from their position of military and, what they saw as, cultural power and positioned Africans along a continuum of human progress relative to the colonizers.

The power of Orientalism rested on the “sheer, overpowering, [and] monumental description” of texts illuminating to the British previously mysterious and unknown spaces and people.<sup>39</sup> This knowledge was crucial for the British in lengthening their political reach over the lives of actual Africans that they envisioned in an imaginary

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<sup>35</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books ed., (New York: Random House, 1979), 7.

<sup>36</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 47.

<sup>37</sup> Said, 5.

<sup>38</sup> Said, 7, 12; Loomba, 73.

<sup>39</sup> Said, 162.

“world on paper.”<sup>40</sup> The textual image was always available to feed or reinforce the British imagination of the colony.

The textual representation of the African interior began with travel literature that focused on assumptions about the West African Other.<sup>41</sup> By 1932, a group of British emissaries, commissioners, surveyors, and anthropologists had disseminated a diverse and detailed collection of writing about the ethnography and history regarding the peoples of the Ashanti hinterland. In the era of social sciences, the Orientalist imaginary of the savannah gained a “scientific and rational basis” that produced a new language for future writers to reference.<sup>42</sup> For instance, the utter centrality of political organization to British officers during the early colonial era directly influenced the historical and especially anthropological discussions leading to post-independence in northern Ghana. The founding academic anthropological studies about the Northern Territories by Ronald Rattray, Meyer Fortes, and Madeline Manoukian divided the many ethnic groups of the savannah according to their chiefly status.<sup>43</sup> The resulting objective social scientific terms “acephalous” and “cephalous” became standardized terms that reduced dynamic human societies to static entities that subtly commented on their level of political evolution towards centralization. This ability to write and transform the real world into textual images of human assumptions was key in confirming, perpetuating, and rehearsing a positive image of chieftaincy in the savannah. As becomes clear in chapter four of this

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<sup>40</sup> Sean Hawkins, *Writing and Colonialism in Northern Ghana* (Toronto: University Press, 2002), *passim*; The written knowledge of colonial dispatches represent the unspoken as well as spoken beliefs of the colonizer about people subject to colonial rule. These beliefs and assumptions originate in the university culture of Europe in the early nineteenth century to shape the “attitudes, values, and theory about the world” in the minds of the colonial administrator. Curtin, *viii*.

<sup>41</sup> Said, 99.

<sup>42</sup> Said, 122.

<sup>43</sup> Madeline Manoukian, *The Tribes of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast*, (London: International African Institute, 1951), 52; Rattray, *Tribes*, xv; Meyer Fortes, “The Political System of the Tallensi of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast” *African Political Systems* ed., M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (Oxford: University Press for the International African Institute, 1932), 260-261.

thesis, the textual representation of chiefly zones in the protectorate was another way colonizers sought to underline the relative inferiority of non-chiefly inhabited regions and thereby create the European modern self-image.

### Knowledge and Power

The reliance of colonial authority upon textual representations of Africa illustrated the historical relationship between power and knowledge. The connection between Britain's growing understanding about chieftaincy and the unfolding of colonial power in the Northern Territories confirmed Ania Loomba's statement that "knowledge [was] not innocent but profoundly connected with the operations of power."<sup>44</sup> Loomba belonged to a wide circle of post-colonial theorists who pinpoint the linkages between knowledge and political control.<sup>45</sup> To this end, Loomba described discursive knowledge as an ordering or patterning of ideas into a "language" or subtext to the explicit meaning of words.<sup>46</sup> When wedded to a political or ideological agenda, indirect meanings have the power to direct "human practices, institutions, and actions."<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Edward Said used discourse analysis to explain the bond between knowledge and colonial power in Africa, Asia, and India. He concluded that texts have the power to create "not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe," especially when texts are informing the decision-making of institutions.<sup>48</sup> According to Said, the "Orientalist" texts contained a discourse, or subtextual voice, that continued from publication to publication: "Orientalism is after

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<sup>44</sup> Loomba, 43.

<sup>45</sup> Useful publications include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 271-313, (Urbana: U of Illinois Press, 1988); Young.

<sup>46</sup> Loomba, 57, 58.

<sup>47</sup> Loomba, 38, 39.

<sup>48</sup> Said, 94.

all a system for citing works and authors.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, European writers developed textual constructions about the ‘Other’ that objectified non-European societies.

The bureaucratic necessity of institutions formalized Orientalist knowledge into seemingly authentic confirmations of reality.<sup>50</sup> An Orientalist writer imbued a “style, figure of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, [but] not the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original.”<sup>51</sup> This, in part, explained how assumptions and early impressions about the savannah, for instance, changed from plainly “textual and contemplative into being administrative, economic, and even military” justifications for British power in the Northern Territories.<sup>52</sup>

According to sociologist Nii’K Plange, as colonial rule in the Northern Territories continued into the twentieth century, annual record keeping “formalized” the protectorate into a labor pool for “capitalist enclaves” in Ashanti and the Colony and not into an economically independent region.<sup>53</sup> While initially expecting an array of northern Muslim powers, the British in time reshaped their thinking to accept any indication of chiefly or centralized rule. To the British mind, the success of their modernizing mission totally hinged on competent chiefs to act as intermediaries. Over a few decades, the absence of many northern chiefs downgraded the overall civilizing mission into an exercise in human resource extraction to serve the southern interior. As this thesis argues specifically in chapter three, the policy shift gained momentum as commissioners began representing northerners in the Annual Reports largely as bushmen without many qualified chiefs.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 210, 240.

<sup>53</sup> Nii-K Plange, 36.



## Orientalist in Comparison

Seeing commonalities between European political history and the socio-political structure of centralized societies confirmed to British elites the inevitability of their European way of life. In particular, any similarity helped confirm to the British the universality of their history that developed the centralized nation-state over centuries.<sup>54</sup> In part, the British contemplated the modernization of the savannah after seeing aspects of their past reflected in powerful chiefly Emirates. British administrators recognized Islam as “a kind of 'medieval', 'feudal' and 'despotic' state-formation, not necessarily as developed as Western concepts but better than the anarchy of 'pagan' tribalism.”<sup>55</sup> For example, centralized authority, monotheism, urbanization, textile-production, literacy, and systems of taxation all appeared to the British administration in northern Nigeria as a Muslim civilizing influence. Furthermore, the British saw market places located in areas of Islamic settlement as proving the civility of Muslims because they seemed to control local finances.<sup>56</sup> All this applause arose despite also paradoxically chastising the Arab influence in West Africa as the cause for slavery in the interior—a bane to the progress of civilization in the continent.<sup>57</sup> Apart from this conflicting view of Islam in the Western Sudan, in the end, the Muslim ancestral influence seemed to elevate traditional Africa towards European expressions of culture.

The image of an Islamicized north had compelling force among colonial decision-makers in the savannah. Before the military occupation of the Northern Territories in

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<sup>54</sup> Carola Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2006), 52.

<sup>55</sup> Holger Weiss, “Variations in the Colonial Representation of Muslims and Islam in Northern Ghana, ca 1900-1929, *Working Papers on Ghana: Historical and Contemporary Studies* 2 (Jan., 2004): 4.

<sup>56</sup> Jack Goody, “Establishing Control: Violence Along the Black Volta at the Beginning of Colonial Rule,” *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 38 Cahier 150/152 (1998): 227-244.

<sup>57</sup> Holger Weiss, 5.

1897 and later shift to civil administration in 1906, the Colonial Office believed that more advanced, Muslim kingdoms would be the agents of native authority. British intelligence gatherers in Ashanti described the most powerful political and economic actors of the north as Islamicized Africans earlier that century.<sup>58</sup> This belief partially rested on a myth of the interior that claimed that Islamic traders and scholars from North Africa were responsible for developing widespread Muslim civilizations across the savannah.<sup>59</sup> The British explorer Mungo Park, in writing about the extensive Muslim trade economy along the Niger River, was particularly influential in drawing a picture of a sphere of Muslim influence around the deserts of Timbuktu south—possibly to the distant fringes of the Ashanti forest.<sup>60</sup>

British rule in Northern Nigeria in the early decades of the twentieth century also furthered the image of a Muslim dominated savannah. The British maintained their rule in the savannah after constructing clear distinctions between superior and inferior communities. Thus, after serving as a regional administrator in northern Nigeria, Lord Lugard had, by 1920, patented indirect rule as a tactic to maintain order by utilizing Muslim rulers to represent the British administration.

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<sup>58</sup> For an outline of sources about the early British representation of the north from 1817 to after independence, see xvi-xviii in Nehemia Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa: The Study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the Pre-Colonial Period*, (Oxford University Press, 1968). The key studies include Joseph Dupuis, *Journal of A Residence in Ashantee, 1824*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, ed. W. E. F. Ward, (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966); John Beecham, *Ashantee and the Gold Coast*, introduction and notes by G. E. Metcalfe (1841; reprint, London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968); Kwame Arhin, ed., *The Papers of George Ekem Ferguson*, (Leiden: Africka-Studiecentrum, 1974); Robert S. Rattray, *Hausa Folk-Lore* (Oxford: University Press, 1969); Rattray, *Ashanti*, (Oxford: University Press, 1969); Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Oxford: University Press, 1969); Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, (Oxford: University Press, 1969); Rattray, *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland* Vol 1 and II, (Oxford: University Press, 1969).

<sup>59</sup> Philip Curtin, *The Image of Africa, British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850*, (Wisconsin Press: University Press: 1964), 25, 115, 226.

<sup>60</sup> Curtin, 256, 267, 405-406, 463.

However, the tribal situation was markedly different further west of Nigeria. Ferguson quickly indicated to his handlers in the Gold Coast Government that Emirates were not present in the savannah north of Ashanti. Despite this fact, Lugard and A. E. G. Watherston, one of the longest serving Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories after 1905, shared the widespread opinion among British imperialists that Islam was an excellent starting point for civilizing the native.<sup>61</sup> Later learning about the Muslim ancestry of chiefly rulers helped the British see chieftaincies like they did Emirates: as rightful holders of power over the lesser developed, decentralized groups. Seeking to duplicate its Nigerian successes, the Colonial Office adjusted its focus towards chieftaincies, such as Mamprussi, Dagomba, Wa, Gonja, and Nanumba, as exemplary forms of centralized government available for British partnership.

#### Orientalist in Contrast

Treating non-chiefly societies as fundamentally different to European societies helped underscore the greatness of European society. The historic influence of Islam in the savannah compelled British colonizers to fully realize the crucial difference between Europeans and the traditional savannah society: Africans, unlike Europeans, were incapable of progress without outside intervention. In his dispatches to Cape Coast, Ferguson dismissed the appearance of Emirates altogether and instead featured a more elementary, racial, and hierarchical division he saw between “state and state-less” societies.<sup>62</sup> He relayed that a recent immigration of Muslim trader/warriors began the chiefly ancestries but not necessarily formal Emirates as in Nigeria. In so doing, he furthered the preoccupation among British colonizers to first see Muslim culture in

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<sup>61</sup> Weiss, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Weiss, 9.

African society as a civilizing force among traditionally non-chiefly societies, and, second, that British colonial rule was essential in fulfilling that mission.<sup>63</sup> The chiefs of the Northern Territories may have had only a mild cultural grasp of Islam, but the religion's broad historical link to chieftaincy in the whole of the savannah continued the influential British perception of a link between Islam and civilization that Lugard helped to develop in Nigeria. In later years of colonial rule in the Northern Territories, the quasi-Muslim chiefs appeared "more intelligent and industrious by nature than the negro of the coast lands," explained Gold Coast Governor Hodgson: "they have advanced considerably further in civilization."<sup>64</sup> Even more so, by applauding the influence of Muslims in the area Ferguson also helped foster a disapproving criticism among British colonizers towards non-chiefly groups untouched by Islamic culture.

Looking for a way to simplify the dizzying ethnic diversity of the region, the initial British publications adopted the historical perspective of regional chiefs who identified the vast non-chiefly communities as an enslaved class of pagans and idol worshipers.<sup>65</sup> As a result of the practice, local ethnic names for non-chiefly groups, conceived by powerful Muslims, such as Dagaba, Grunshi, and Lobi, "began to denote lack of civilization, political anarchy and nakedness—connotations the colonial masters subsequently adopted."<sup>66</sup> When they arrived to the Northern Territories, the British assumed the local Muslim perspective of non-chiefly groups, a view the British welcomed considering their high esteem of Islamic culture and its effects in the savannah.

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<sup>63</sup> Marion Johnson reminds readers that Ferguson routinely spoke about furthering "our way of life" and the benefits of "our civilization" in the savannah in his correspondence to his British handlers at Cape Coast; a curious statement considering his ethnic Fante background. "Shorter Notice," *Journal of African History* (1976), 17: 638.

<sup>64</sup> Gold Coast Colonial Secretary F. M. Hodgson, cited in Robinson, Gallagher, and Denny, 386.

<sup>65</sup> Lentz, 73, 76, 80.

<sup>66</sup> Lentz, 23.

In the end, the combination of values strengthened the cultural divide between non-chiefly groups and the British and helped secure the savage and backwardness image of the savannah.

Importantly, Ferguson's influential negative perspective about the savannah was a result of both his southern Akan heritage and vocational training at the university establishment in London. In fact, the coastal region was a site for a dynamic triangulation of negative perceptions about northerners from the British, the Ashanti, and their Muslim attendants. The growing British negativity towards non-chiefly groups reflected the common view of the north held by Akan chiefs and influential Muslim associates in Ashanti. Clearly, Gold Coast officials appropriated the Ashanti or Akan "mental map" of the people and landscape of the savannah. In his 1992 study, *On Mental Mapping Greater Asante*, historian Ivor Wilks argued for further study into how pre-colonial "practices, procedures, and mentalities" influenced the colonial perspective of space and identity in West Africa.<sup>67</sup> His study illuminated how early nineteenth century British agents Thomas Bowdich and Joseph Dupuis used the Ashanti view of space to envision the Asante Confederacy while visiting Kumasi.<sup>68</sup> Wilks' contention about the cultural exchange between British and Ashanti agents illustrated the likelihood that British intelligence gathering borrowed Akan, and, considering the influence of Muslims in Kumasi, Muslim perspectives about the savannah.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ivor Wilks, "On Mental Mapping Greater Asante," *Journal of African History* Vol. 33 No., 2 (1992): 190.

<sup>68</sup> Wilks, "On Mental Mapping Greater Asante," 175.

<sup>69</sup> "The savannah wilderness came to represent the extreme fringes of the spiritually hazardous yet potent domain outside [Ashanti] culture," a distant land the Akan typically felt inhabited by slaves. See John Parker, "Northern Gothic," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* Vol., 76 No., 3 (2006): 358, 370.

These dual uses of knowledge—of the ongoing comparison and contrast between the savannah and British culture—used and contributed to the enduring positive representations of chieftaincy to ultimately serve the European modern image. With the superiority of chieftaincy and the inferiority of non-chiefly groups well imagined, the British focused on the principles of indirect rule and supported the few strong chiefs they encountered while fabricating chiefly rulers over the even more numerous decentralized communities of the savannah.

### Non-Chiefly Groups and the Problems of Indirect Rule

The British struggled to implement strategies of indirect rule over the honeycomb of politically decentralized communities.<sup>70</sup> The administration considered non-chiefly groups prone to indiscriminate violence and unable to self-govern and cooperate with British officers. The British pursued two tactics in these areas. First, the resistance of non-chiefly groups attracted the military aggression of the colonizers as a means to create peace and order and ensure the security of economic development. Second, as an alternative to military aggression, the administration installed chiefs that theoretically could integrate dozens of village-compounds local hierarchies into presumably controllable groups.

The first British tactic against non-chiefly groups was the use of military force. The colonizers arrived to the Gold Coast and the savannah as a superior military power that could defeat any symmetrical armed resistance but not without difficulty caused by asymmetrical forms of resistance, such as guerilla-styled attacks and non-conformity. Although the British lost the initial battles, in the longer term the better-equipped colonial military routinely defeated the Ashanti.

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<sup>70</sup> Wrong, 419.

The Northwest Province of the protectorate was a key location of resistance and subsequent British violence. Constructing telephone lines, postal services, and roadways provided communication and increased trade in the protectorate. But these features of European civilization required local security, either from cooperative chiefs over their villages, or from the use of force among the Grunshi, the non-chiefly peoples of the savannah.<sup>71</sup> These wild areas of the protectorate openly resisted British forces, such as through looting caravans, but more often employed the “weapons of the weak” through tactical evasions and non-compliance with tax regimes or supply carriers.<sup>72</sup> At other times Africans attempted to settle local disputes by playing on the British mandate to promote peace and order.<sup>73</sup>

As a second approach in non-chiefly regions, the British faced the prospects of long-term rule by installing chiefs from prominent villagers. Recalling what the British learned in the Anglo-Ashanti Wars, the northern "indigenous states were easier to conquer and control through their hierarchies" than what the numerous decentralized communities presented.<sup>74</sup> Conversely, chieftaincy groups were only successful if and when the British underestimated their foe, as the British initially did during their first clashes with the Ashanti. Even in areas with some centralized authority through minor chiefs or headmen, such as in Lobi, the British gained a small measure of control.<sup>75</sup> While the administration appointed chiefs to integrate decentralized groups like the Konkomba, the British also needed to increase their visits and extended stays via a system of

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<sup>71</sup> Goody, 237.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 234, 235, 238; James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, (Yale: University Press, 1985).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>75</sup> Goody, 237.

guesthouses to “continually support” the chiefs.<sup>76</sup> In fabricating chiefly hierarchies, for example, “the British colonial authorities basically engineered the subjugation of Konkombas and allied clans under the rule of the chiefs.”<sup>77</sup> When communities like the Konkomba, Lobi, or Tallensi opposed the isolated outposts, the administration interpreted the resistance as proof of the degeneracy of non-chiefly societies and their unwillingness to civilize.

At the same time indirect rule created some serious problems that undermined British control and legitimacy in the protectorate. By the 1930s, Gold Coast anthropologist Ronald Rattray reported from villagers that chiefs gained uncustomary degrees of power and wealth and often extorted the peasantry.<sup>78</sup> Instructed to assist the administration to produce an indirect styled approach to colonial rule developed in Nigeria, Rattray confirmed in detail the opinion of the administration that the years of supporting, and more often completely fabricating, chiefly rulers was producing local unrest and negative feelings among villages towards the British-backed Warrant Chiefs. Throughout the Northern Territories, the vast array of district level Native Authorities created a “decentralized despotism” that ordinary peasants often despised.<sup>79</sup>

The powerful Native Courts transformed customary legalities into rigid written legal codes without offering any internal accountability process except to British staff.<sup>80</sup> Mamdani argued that British counterfeiting of chiefs in decentralized West African society “shifted” the alliances of ordinary men and removed the “popular” and “peer”

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<sup>76</sup> Goody, 234, 240.

<sup>77</sup> Joseph Manboah-Rockson, “Chiefs in Post-Colonial Ghana,” *Chieftain*, Vol. 7 (2007), 7.

<sup>78</sup> Mamdani, 33, 37, 54.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 23, 37-61.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.



restraints that functioned in much of Africa.<sup>81</sup> He further complained that the British assumed “a chief on every piece of administrative ground” in Africa, and when confronted with diffuse political boundaries and little centralized government, the colonizers simplified ethnic distinctions through creating new or imagined political allegiances.<sup>82</sup> As a result, in some African colonies the British had to respond to significant revolts, such as those in Tanganyika, Igboland, and Nigeria.<sup>83</sup> In the Northern Territories, non-compliance and routine violent disruptions to caravan routes were the manifestations of local resistance. As was also the case in the Northern Territories, the British responded to the “decentralized despotism” problem in two ways: first, by offering a salary to chiefs to preemptively satisfy their need for financial gain; and, second, by instituting more British control over the selection and removal of chiefly rulers.<sup>84</sup>

A vital contradiction appeared while Britain increasingly contemplated indirect rule after 1900. Most in the Colonial Office seemed to miss the quandary in attempting to preserve traditional chieftaincy as a vehicle for modern self-rule, infrastructure, and other aspects of European civilization. At some point in the endeavor, a tipping-point between the balance of African tradition and material/socio-political progress must occur. An example of this problem emerged after Britain spent much of the nineteenth century degrading and eventually shattering the Asante Confederacy and the power of the Asantehene. However, when the Gold Coast Government commissioned Ronald Sutherland Rattray to assess Ashanti “native institutions,” British intentions were to

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 41, 43.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 54.

somehow preserve and utilize traditional Akan chieftaincies.<sup>85</sup> Like many in the Gold Coast, he saw not only Ashanti, but also the whole of the Akan-speaking region of the forested Gold Coast as a “nation” that the colonial administration in turn framed as a “breakwater” against the “waves of Western civilization.”<sup>86</sup> The paradox became clear when, around the same time, the Northern Territories Chief Commissioner clearly believed the British “Juggernaut” retained the initiative over African tradition:

The speed of material development in the Gold Coast is such that within the next decade all traces of native thought, religion, and inspiration will be erased or flattened out in the heavy wheel-tracks of the petrol-driven cars of the Juggernaut of commercialism.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, the effort to create modernity by preserving tradition created an impossible, circular task for British social engineers. Nevertheless, the civilizing activity continued into the twentieth century, when the British Empire targeted chiefly communities of the savannah to mediate the progression of modernity.

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<sup>85</sup> Kimble, 478.

<sup>86</sup> Kimble, citing a 1927 statement by Chief Commission of the Gold Coast, Fredrick Guggisberg. 487.

<sup>87</sup> A. W. Cardinal, “The State of Our Ethnographical Knowledge of the Gold Coast Peoples,” *Africa: Journal of the African Affairs Institute*, Vol. 2 No., 4 (Oct., 1929): 405-412, 412.

## 2. Travel and diplomatic literature

The establishment of colonial rule in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast Colony reflected the British preoccupation with chieftaincy representing human progress. The British gained control over the region in 1898 after Ferguson negotiated treaties with northern chieftaincies believed to control local politics and trade.<sup>88</sup> Examining his correspondence reveals that the British affirmation of chieftaincy adapted a popular imaginary about the interior grasslands of West Africa.

George Ferguson was a member of the growing educated African elite working for the Gold Coast government before the turn of the eighteenth century. Gold Coast Governor, William Griffith, recognized that African agents were necessary to assist the British expansion into the interior.<sup>89</sup> Hiring local staff meant paying lower wages and having field officers with greater immunity to malaria and sleeping sickness in the so-called White man's grave of British West Africa.<sup>90</sup> Although Ferguson was not British, his European cartography training and experience in West African negotiations allowed him to become an influential voice praising chieftaincy to the Colonial Office. By birth, Ferguson was a Fante, the coastal ethnic group who served as middlemen in the European trading partnership with the Asante Confederacy. After primary education in Sierra Leone, he gained employment as a teacher in the Wesleyan School at the Cape Coast, and, while serving as a government clerk from 1881, designed a map for the British about local people living among the settlements on the Gold Coast. His talent for identifying ethnic distinctions helped Ferguson progress through the colonial political service and eventually graduate with distinction from the London Royal School of Mines in 1890.

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<sup>88</sup> Claridge, 427-431.

<sup>89</sup> A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, "Review[Untitled]," *Journal of the International African Institute* Vol., 46 No., 3 (1976), 297.

<sup>90</sup> L. H. Gann and Peter Duigan, 257.

After serving in negotiations on behalf of the British in the interior of the Gold Coast, Ferguson worked as a Surveyor of Roads with the Gold Coast Public Works Department.<sup>91</sup> Yet, the highlight of his career, which supports the focus of the discussion below, was that he was able to singlehandedly increase British control over the hinterland north of Ashanti in 1897.<sup>92</sup>

Ferguson reflected the view about the wild and backwards society of the savannah shared by his British superiors and his Akan heritage. Ferguson's writing revealed his total embrace for the British civilizing mission.<sup>93</sup> As an intermediary between the Cape Coast and Ashanti, Ferguson likely understood that Muslims were key players in the Ashanti court. The Muslim agents attending the Ashanti king during his few visits to the south were the only real links that coastal outposts had to savannah society.<sup>94</sup> The northerners appeared to the Fante and the British as impressive monotheists and literate Hausas with the power to tender yearly tributes of slaves from a spiritually dark land.

The Ferguson mission was the first British expedition into the plains between Kumasi, the capital of the Asante Confederacy, and the desert trading city of Timbuktu. Before his travels, the British Colonial Office envisioned bands of Muslim warlords dominating the trade and politics of the region. The London office previously relied on a series of reports from British agents who only visited the boundaries of the Gold Coast hinterland. In particular, the combined narratives of Mungo Park, Thomas Bowdich, Joseph Dupuis, and Heinrich Barth described the people of Dagomba, Gonja, and Mossi as Muslim slave raiding kingdoms and competitors to Asante power. Despite this

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<sup>91</sup> Kwame Arhin, ed, *The Papers of George Ekem Ferguson: A Fanti Official of the Government of the Gold Coast, 1890-1897* (Leiden: Afrika-Studiecentrum), 1974, x; Raymond Dumett, "Review[untitled]," *The International Journal of African Historical Society* Vol., 8 No., 4 (1974), 117.

<sup>92</sup> Myron Echenberg, "Review[untitled]," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* Vol., 11 No., 1 (1977), 142.

<sup>93</sup> Marion Johnson, "Review[untitled]," *Journal of African History* Vol., 17 No., 4 (1976), 638.

<sup>94</sup> Also, Fante workers were among the Kumasi court. Lewin, 15.

convincing picture, Ferguson cast a contrasting image of the north absent of Muslim States while reporting from the center of the savannah.

Ferguson pointed towards chieftaincies instead of Emirates as holders of political power. In addition, he suggested that the few chiefly groups often professed their dominance over a myriad of village compounds that were without traditions of centralized authority. After meeting countless chiefs, village headmen, and African spiritualists, Ferguson also proposed to London the Muslim ancestry of chiefly lines, and the resulting political office of the chief, as a unique and distinguishing feature of savannah society. Ferguson reported that, in previous centuries, bands of Islamic traders immigrated to the savannah and introduced centralized rule to a handful of otherwise non-chiefly groups. In turn, the British applauded the appearance of chieftaincy as a fortunate cultural trait for Africans whom they perceived as incapable of independent change. Importantly, Ferguson's correspondence helped popularize official British sentiment in West Africa that the rise of Islamic culture in the savannah elevated tribal society. Indeed, describing the superficial practices of Islam among chieftaincies was one way Ferguson perpetuated this belief in the minds of administrative officers in the Northern Territories.

The view that chieftaincies were the more advanced tribes helped the protectorate administration think chiefs were local partners in the civilizing mission. As such, indications of the British mission linking arms with local chiefs appeared in the opening years' administrative correspondence from the Northern Territories. The work of British officers in developing the northern region into interconnecting profitable agricultural districts was a major tactic in achieving this strategic goal. Besides creating western styled markets in the savannah, the civilizing mission required establishing the

protectorate as a peaceful and orderly society. In their other civilizing goals, such as fighting slavery and kidnappings, thefts, and murders, the British advanced their practice of building relationships with local chiefs as willing mediators to government law and order policies.

In contrast to the positive image of chieftaincies, senior administrators in the Northern Territories categorized non-chiefly peoples, such as Fra-Fra, Lobi, and Dagarti, as more savage and stressed that they would oppose British impositions of law and order.<sup>95</sup> A major example to the British of the inferiority of non-chiefly groups was recognizing chieftaincy as a form of power subjugating non-chiefly areas. Thus, influencing and supporting chiefly rule was also an effort to extend colonial authority over non-chiefly areas the British believed were typically wild, savage, and infantile. Building upon the increased security provided by chiefly districts, British commissioners built up their presence throughout the north by constructing guesthouses that bolstered routine staff visits into non-chiefly districts.

### Myth(s) of the Interior

During the hundred years before Ferguson's mission, the Colonial Office had some reason to believe that Islam might have held a more contemporary place in the savannah. The myth of the interior, a misrepresentation of West African politics dominated by powerful Muslims, first appeared in British texts published by the African Association during the late 1790s. Similar to the discussions in academic and religious circles about the Orient in the early nineteenth century, the British Colonial Office did not rely on any "real discussions between Christians and Muslims" but only on their

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<sup>95</sup> *ARNT*, 1903, 4.

perceptions of Islamic culture civilizing Africans.<sup>96</sup> What follows is a brief outline of British sources that underpin the Ferguson mission and the official British belief to that time that Muslims dominated the savannahs of the Northern Territories.

In his posthumous travel journal, *Travel in the Interior Districts of Africa*, Mungo Park (1790) described extensive Muslim networks for the trade commodities of Egypt and the Barber Coast into Timbuktu, situated on the Niger River. Park actually intended his voluminous descriptions of the African interior to illuminate for his late eighteenth readers their intellectual darkness about the heart of the continent. He did this by highlighting the brutalities of slaving rulers over a continent of nameless and savage people in need of colonial “cultivation.”<sup>97</sup> From Timbuktu, goods traveled further south to distant townships of the savannah and forested interior Guinea Coast.

The first face-to-face encounter between the Asante Confederacy and the British Empire in 1807 further reflected the myth of the Muslim interior. The meeting impressed upon the Colonial Office a high probability that Muslim chiefs operated north of Kumasi. The Asante King, Osei Bonsu, led a military force in pursuit of a handful of Asante criminals against Colonel Torrane, the British Governor of the coastal Fort at Anomano. Reminiscing on the negotiations that followed the first of six Anglo-Ashanti Wars, Torrane considered the Asante “advanced in civilization to the people of the waterside.”<sup>98</sup> He wildly announced that, “in fact the Moors seem to have spread over the whole interior

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<sup>96</sup> Andrew F. Walls, “Africa as the Theatre of Christian Engagement with Islam in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* Vol. 29 (May 1999): 157.

<sup>97</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol. I* (Chicago: University Press, 1991), 91-93.

<sup>98</sup> “Colonel G. Torrane to the Committee of Merchants: Ashanti Invasion, 20 July 1807,” in *British Policy Towards West Africa: Select Documents 1786-1874*, C. W. Newbury, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965),

of Africa” because Quaranic talismans adorned King Bonsu and that the King’s closest advisors all appeared to be Muslim scribes.<sup>99</sup>

The Bowdich and Dupuis missions further deepened the myth of the Muslim interior by detailing the presence of slave raiding, Muslim emissaries to the Asante court.<sup>100</sup> The Gold Coast government sent Bowdich and Dupuis in two separate diplomatic missions to negotiate peace with the Ashanti chief over trade access routes from the forest to the European coastal forts. By following the Bowdich expedition, Dupuis was Cape Coast’s second failed diplomatic attempt to establish peace with the Asantehene and settle trade disputes between Kumasi and the interior coastal states. Similar to the instructions the Cape Coast Governor gave Ferguson, Bowdich and Dupuis had secondary orders from Britain to gather intelligence about what the British suspected in 1807 as a Muslim north extending past the ninth parallel of latitude north of Kumasi.<sup>101</sup>

Park’s imagination of the interior persuaded the British Treasury Office to instruct Bowdich to gain any further understanding about the interconnection between the Sahara and the grasslands.<sup>102</sup> Important to the Bowdich mission, which took place in 1817, was finding southern access points to the Niger and Joliba rivers described by Park. These rivers were legendary desert trading networks to the British where Park drowned trying to establish contact with the local Muslim kings.<sup>103</sup> In 1819, the Governor of Cape Coast Castle, John Hope Smith, charged Bowdich to discover “what nation are the Moors that

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<sup>99</sup> Torrane was referring to the coastal Fante, who the British militarily and economically supported against the Ashanti in the months after the meeting; Colonel Torrane to the Committee Cape Coast Castle, 20 July, 1807. C. E. Metcalfe, ed. *Great Britain and Ghana: Documents of Ghana History, 1807-1957*, (Legon: University of Ghana, 1964), 11.

<sup>100</sup> Robinson, 128.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Edward Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee*, New Edition, (London: Griffith & Farran, 1873), 3; Joseph Dupuis, *A Journal of a Residence in Ashantee*. 2nd Edition. ed. W. E. Ward (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1966), iii, v.

<sup>102</sup> Bowdich, 10.

<sup>103</sup> Bowdich, 10, 14.



frequent the Ashantee country, and for what purpose do they go there?”<sup>104</sup> The British had no firsthand experience with the people and territory south of Timbuktu to Kumasi, and the Colonial Office could only deduce that the influence of Muslim slavers extended all the way south into Ashanti. Should the then dire political situation between the British and the Asantehene improve, the Colonial Office hoped to gain safe and direct trading access further inland with the so-called savannah Muslims. The British hoped their first political missions further inland of the Gold Coast forts would be able to make contact with and establish economic alliances with the Muslim kings whom they increasingly saw dominating the landscape north of Kumasi.

Hutchison, the writer and future British resident to Kumasi with the Bowdich mission, described to his British readers in 1817 the amulets, pieces of Quranic verse tied to weapons, necklaces, and silk clothing that adorned important Muslims individuals from “remote territories.”<sup>105</sup> Bowdich identified these foreigners to Kumasi as Dagomba representatives from a distant Islamicized West African tributary to Kumasi. For instance, accompanied by an entourage of young men and boys, a significant “Moor” named Baba often visited Bowdich, who resided in the guest quarters of the Asantehene.<sup>106</sup> Baba affirmed to Bowdich that European manufactured firearms enabled the Ashanti to subjugate the “Dagwumba,” which Bowdich highlighted as a chieftaincy of accomplished equestrians that controlled many trading outposts along the northern

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<sup>104</sup> Bowdich, 10.

<sup>105</sup> Bowdich, 34, 35, 38, 41, 47, 271; The Asantehenes widely believed that the Koran read among the Kumasi Muslims, or Nkramo, was a sacred fetish. Lewin, 38-39; For the Muslim influence in Ashanti, see, Wilks, “The Position of Muslims in Metropolitan Ashanti in the Early Nineteenth Century” in I. M. Lewis ed., *Islam in Topical Africa* (London: 1966); Levtzion, “Coastal West Africa,” in *Islam in Africa*, James Kritzeck and William H. Lewis, eds., (Toronto: D. Van Nostrom Company, Ltd., 1969); Wilks, “Asante and Kumasi: A Muslim Minority in a ‘Sea of Paganism,’” in David Robinson ed., *Muslim Societies In African History*, Cambridge, 2004; “The Growth of Islamic Learning in Ghana,” *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria* Ibadan 2 (4) December 1963: 409-417.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 102.

frontier of the Asante Empire.<sup>107</sup> Illustrating the wealth, economic diversity, and relative power of the northern Emir, the Dagomba paid the Ashanti a yearly tribute of 500 slaves, 200 cows, 400 sheep, 400 Cotton-cloths, and 400 silk cloths.<sup>108</sup>

Before his meeting with the Asante King, Bowdich passed another group of people dressed as “Moors,” a group of seventeen men “arrayed in large cloaks of white satin, richly trimmed with spangled embroidery; their shirts and trousers were of silk, and a very large turban of white muslin was studded with a border of different-coloured stones.”<sup>109</sup> Similarly, a number of servants appeared at court wearing “red caps and turbans, and long white shirts, which hung over their trousers.”<sup>110</sup> Without going into further detail of individual cases here, it is clear that Dupuis, in his report, also went to great lengths to provide many superficial examples of Islamic cultural affinities in Ashanti.<sup>111</sup> In the end, Hutchison reported that Bowdich was unable to ask the Asantehene directly about northern chieftaincies because the King suspected the Bowdich mission was part of a larger British plan for war.<sup>112</sup> Clearly, Bowdich provided the British detailed textual evidence of a Muslim presence in Ashanti that suggested a greater Islamic power to the north. These details resonated with the British ideas about a non-African cultural influence that further suggested the social and political advancement Islam appeared to bring to tribal Africa. As a result, the Dupuis mission to Kumasi reflected an intentional shift towards Britain possibly making contact with the advanced Muslim powers of the savannah.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 186, 273.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>109</sup> Bowdich, 14.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>111</sup> Dupuis, 107, 127.

<sup>112</sup> Bowdich, 61.

Representing the Gold Coast Government in the subsequent mission to Kumasi, Dupuis argued that Islamic society elevated politics in West Africa. Upon reading from Bowdich, what seemed to be a close relationship between Islam and political control in the north, the Colonial Office recognized Dupuis as a suitable representative to replace Hutchinson as British resident to Kumasi.<sup>113</sup> In particular, Dupuis' experience as an Arabic speaking British Emissary to the Barbary Coast allowed him to seek out Muslim interpreters to the Asantehene, or Asante King.<sup>114</sup> Dupuis' experience with Muslim authorities in Morocco suggests decision-makers in London intended to establish relationships with other powerful Muslim agents south of the Sahara. Dupuis himself viewed his mission to Kumasi as another venture into the Muslim interior recalling his previous mission in north Africa.<sup>115</sup>

Dupuis created an image of a Muslim interior south of the Niger River that most corresponded with Park's earlier descriptions of an ascendant Islam in West Africa. Dupuis wrote at length about the Ashanti debt to Muslim warlords in establishing the Asante Confederacy in the eighteenth century. Dupuis gained the Muslim view of Ashanti history from Bashaw, a powerful Dagomba court attendant to the Asante king (Asantehene).<sup>116</sup> Dupuis related the common view among local "heathens as well as the Moslems" that an "early age of Islam" established the Ashanti as leaders in the interior Guinea forest.<sup>117</sup> He described a former alliance between powerful Muslims and the "[h]eathens of Ashantee, Banna, Juabin, and other tributary states in the North" that fought the Denkira in establishing Kumasi as the center of the Asante Empire in around

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<sup>113</sup> Dupuis, iii, iv, ix.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., vi, 112.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 224-227, 236.

1721.<sup>118</sup> In Dupuis' time, the "Ashantee" were the most powerful of the African powers along the Gold Coast. Suggesting that a Muslim northern state was somehow responsible for establishing the Asante Confederacy significantly elevated the image of chieftaincies to the Colonial Office.

The Dupuis contribution to the myth of the interior also included the belief that the ancestors of Dagomba and Gonja were descendent from ancient Egypt two centuries before Christ.<sup>119</sup> He further described Hausa, Gonja, and Dagomba as some of the most prominent savannah societies in West Africa. The Dagomba capital and trading center of Yendi, according to Dupuis, "is said to be at least four times as extensive as the capital of Ashantee."<sup>120</sup> He typified the inhabitants along the Volta River basin, such as the Dagomba, Hausa, Wangara, and others, as masters over an extensive commercial network.<sup>121</sup> Thus, Dupuis' political background and human intelligence sources in Kumasi were pivotal to his contribution to seeing the ascendancy of Islam along the Volta River basin.

The myth of the interior appeared in another travelogue reminiscent of Park's writing decades after the Bowdich and Dupuis missions. One of the clearest accounts about the ability of Islam to "enlighten" the darkness of the African mind comes from Henry Barth. Barth was a sought after African expert accompanying a team of British Abolitionists who set out via Tripoli to cross the Sahara with support from the British Foreign Office in 1849. His proficiency in Arabic and experienced capabilities for

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 229, 250.

<sup>119</sup> Dupuis, lxxxiii.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., xc.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., civ.

navigating great distances were indispensable credentials for the mission.<sup>122</sup> Barth saw Islam as the only saving grace among the “barbarians”:

My statements will serve at the same time to prove that the Blacks, whom we consider as barbarians, so far from being wholly destitute of intelligence, are very little behind the generality of the peasantry of Europe. The Mahometan religion, professed by almost all the African nations that I have visited, has enlightened their minds, softened their manners and abolished those cruel customs which are retained by man in a savage state.<sup>123</sup>

Fascinatingly, his comments also typify the British assumption that Africans are dependent on outside intervention to civilize their essentially “savage state”.

Moreover, Barth hoped his 1856 travelogue, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, would unveil to science “a most extensive tract of the secluded African world” for the ultimate hope of fostering an ongoing European and West African relationship.<sup>124</sup> He claimed that he had created positive relationships with “all the most powerful chiefs along the [Niger] River up to the mysterious city [of Timbuktu] itself.”<sup>125</sup>

Barth’s three volumes revealed the most details about the potential economic centers of the savannah that were later useful to the Ferguson mission in 1896. Barth described the dominance of the Songhai Caliphate over the whole of society north to the Niger River and south to the people of Gruma. At the same time, he underlined the tenacity of Mossi, a people he perceived as a collection of semi-independent tribes descending from the Fulbe. Barth also located the market townships of Yendi (the Dagomba capital) and Salaga (the Gonja capital) on a road connecting Kumasi to further

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<sup>122</sup> R. Mansell Prothero, “Heinrich Barth and the Western Sudan” *The Geographic Journal* Vol., 124 No., 3 (Sep., 1958), 327.

<sup>123</sup> Henry Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa, Vol. III*, (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishing, 1859), vii.

<sup>124</sup> Barth, 631.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 631.

northern townships, such as Gambaga, the capital township of the “Chokoshi.”<sup>126</sup> Finally, the marauding of Zabarma mercenaries into the savage areas of the savannah also appeared in Barth’s writing.<sup>127</sup> By 1900, the northern administration would come to routinely focus on the Gruma, Mossi, Dagomba, and Gonja as key African communities to come under British rule. Additionally, the British also became concerned about the long-term negative effects of the Zabarma slave-raiders on non-chiefly areas when attempting to control the Northern Territories. Thus, in attempting to contact Muslim powers of the north vis-à-vis Ferguson, the Colonial Office came to believe that the Dagomba, Gonja, and Mossi represented the major African powers of the north.

With these various writings in mind, in preparing Ferguson, the Gold Coast authorities acted on existing intelligence reports that the Dagomba, Gonja, and Mossi were foremost Muslim states. On April 25 1892, the Governor at Cape Coast Castle, William Brandford Griffith, instructed Ferguson to negotiate treaties with “Dagomba, Gonja, Gourounsi, and Mossi.”<sup>128</sup> The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Knutsford, had decided that establishing treaties of friendship and trade with indigenous authorities would ensure British victory over Germany and France in establishing power over the region north of Ashanti.

Ferguson helped create for British decision-makers a tendency to think chiefly led communities were advanced African communities of Muslim descent. In doing so, the British pictured Chiefs instead of Muslims as best representatives of local authority. Ferguson equated chieftaincies, especially the Dagomba and Gonja, as potentially stabilizing forces among the presumably chaotic wilderness of the northern grasslands.

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 643, 45.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 642.

<sup>128</sup> Arhin, 66; Secret Despatch, Sir W. B. Griffith to G. E. Ferguson, April 25, 1892, C. E. Metcalfe, ed. 454.

He suggested that had the British been more aggressive after defeating Kumasi in 1874, the Gold Coast could have quickly gained Dagomba and Gonja as allies, since he confirmed that both groups were unhappy tributaries of the Asantehene.<sup>129</sup> In addition, Ferguson applauded the Dagomba and Moshi use of horses and modified Danish long-rifles to gain political power as examples of “civilized” mastery of animals and technology.<sup>130</sup> To Ferguson, the establishment of Dagomba, as well as Moshi and Gruma, were a result of past military conquests of “Moorish riders” against the resident Grunshi and other “inhospitable barbarous tribes” that seemed to swarm the countryside.<sup>131</sup> The Colonial Office would have recognized the Dagomba from the accounts of Bowdich and Dupuis describing the Dagomba as a leading Muslim savannah power, and thus had reasonable concerns. In reporting to London about how the Boundary Commission divided Dagomba into German and British controlled areas, Special Commissioner Kenney described the Dagomba as a “quarrelsome, turbulent race...bitterly opposed to any white domination.”<sup>132</sup> However, this early note is an ironic portrayal, since, as this thesis clarifies, the British soon praised the Dagomba as a compliant chiefly group helping to fortify colonial authority into the 1930s.

The Ferguson correspondence also reflected the superficial descriptions of the north found in the writing of previous political missions into the interior. In step with the hundred-year Orientalist depiction of the savannah, he continued the interpretation of what seemed to be indications of Muslim culture among chiefly groups to help signify their superiority over their non-chiefly neighbors. For instance, he identified the production of Arabic-styled, dyed textiles as important achievements separating “more-

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<sup>129</sup> Arhin, 74.

<sup>130</sup> Arhin, 74.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>132</sup> Gold Coast Conf. 309 Captain Kenney Herbert to Joseph Chamberlain, February 9 1898.

savage tribes (such as Gurunshi, Busiansi, Pampamba &c.)” from their evolved chiefly neighbors:

in Gonja, Dagomba, Mosi, Gruma, and the Hausa countries, the people weave their own cloths, dye them in different shades of indigo, black, and yellow, and adopt the well-known garb of the Mohommedan-professing tribes of Africa.<sup>133</sup>

Here, Ferguson plainly ascribed superiority to people that seemed to reflect a “well-known” European image of Muslim society in North Africa or Arabia. “The practices of Islamism,” Ferguson noted, “have introduced many Arabic names of persons...as well as Mahommedan marriage rites. Polygamy is practiced.”<sup>134</sup> In all, the appearance of textiles, Arabic names, and Islamic marriage ceremonies at least challenged the British expectation of savage Africa as naked, illiterate, and prone to sexual immorality. By these descriptors, Ferguson echoed the British-European evaluation of human progress typical of the Orientalist tradition.

The description of similarly robed chiefs and Muslim attendants figured throughout Ferguson’s description of various districts in Gonja. In addition to textile manufacture, Ferguson also noted that housing construction in Gonja utilized flat rooftops instead of the typical West African conical thatched designs. These dwellings appeared within various “walled towns” that recalled the memory of fortified cities in medieval Europe, Mesopotamia, or Egypt.<sup>135</sup> The many references to what appeared to show the pervasiveness of Islamic culture among northern chieftaincies illustrated the importance the religion had for the British in indicating human progress in West Africa.

Thus, these key British representatives described northern chiefly groups in compelling Islamic cultural imagery. Over time, the perceived connection between Islam

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<sup>133</sup> Arhin 68.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>135</sup> Arhin, 68.



and chieftaincy helped bolster the British perception that Africans with centralized authority were superior to non-chiefly communities. The Ferguson papers further revealed the British capacity to marginalize non-chiefly regions as historically and culturally stagnant. His writing also revealed the belief that African innovation required outside, or non-African, intervention. In the end, Ferguson helped focus the attention of the British towards chieftaincy as a potential source of native control in the Northern Territories. British Commissioners in the protectorate in turn sought to develop their presence in chieftaincies believing superior tribes ruled the regions and had power over inferior non-chiefly groups.

#### The Superiority of Chieftaincy

The belief in the superiority of chiefly groups shaped the early strategy to expand British political influence north of Kumasi. The early British correspondence and administrative records from the protectorate point toward two examples illustrating the positive image of chieftaincy among the British. First, the cautious reaction to the military operations of the Muslim warlord Samory in January 1898 illustrated a healthy British respect for chieftaincy. Besides the encroaching French and German positions, the British recognized Samory as an imminent danger to the tenuous military position headquartered in the township of Gambaga. Second, the diplomatic strategy against German and French competition for the territory north of Kumasi drew on the British high assessment of chieftaincy. The British believed that treaty agreements with chiefs would ensure their legitimacy against the French and German powers operating in the vicinity.

The defensive stance towards Samory revealed a healthy respect for local chiefly and Muslim authorities among British officers who held inferior military positions. Eager

to develop a profitable agricultural industry in the north, the Colonial Office was concerned that Samory's military operations would interdict the valuable caravan trade routes connecting the whole of the West African bulge. Yet, the British decision-makers did not want direct confrontation with Samory and hoped that French positions in Cote D'Ivoire would take the responsibility to neutralize local disturbances. British policy was not to confront Samory unless his forces provoked an altercation. Ferguson suspected that Samory's forces were preparing to continue advancing near to the British position in the northwest district of Bona.<sup>136</sup> After Ferguson died during Samory's attack on Bona in 1897, the British built upon their treaty agreements and established a small military administration around Gambaga. By 1898, the British deemed Samory dangerous to the peace of Black Volta District, an area further south and outside French control that obliged a British response. A few months later, Lieutenant-Colonel Northcott, the first commanding officer over the Northern Territories, required Major Walker to fortify Bona against further attacks by Samory into the Black Volta.<sup>137</sup> Samory's impressive military prowess after the altercation fitted the British conviction about the supremacy of chiefs compared to the non-chiefly, "savage and hostile tribes of Lobi."<sup>138</sup>

The second point that illustrated British recognition for the potency of chieftaincy was key to Britain's success during the partition of Africa. The British believed that treating with local chiefs was the ideal strategy for beating Germany and France in the competition to control the Volta River basin. In 1888 the Boundary Commission between

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<sup>136</sup> Arhin, x.

<sup>137</sup> Gold Coast Conf., Lieut-Colonel Northcott to Colonial Secretary, 2 March 1898, para. 5.

<sup>138</sup> Gold Coast Conf., Lieut-Colonel Northcott to Colonial Secretary, 2 March 1898, para. 4; Major Walker's accompanying field intelligence report that Samory commanded a force armed with one 7 pounder gun, French carbines, and mounted on 1000 horses was also a convincing display of military capability to the British. Major H. S. Walker to Northern Territories, 14 January 1898. The National Archives (NA).

Germany and England agreed on a zone of neutrality north of Ashanti.<sup>139</sup> The accord preserved peaceful relations along the northern frontiers of German Togoland and British controlled Ashanti and Gold Coast. The French presence west of Cote D'Ivoire also helped motivate British exploration into land above the ninth parallel yet unclaimed by Europeans.<sup>140</sup> As such, in 1892, Ferguson signed treaties for Britain with the Bole, Daboya, Dagomba, and Bimbila.<sup>141</sup> In 1894 Ferguson negotiated further agreements with the Wa, Chakosi, Mamprussi, Mossi, and Bona.<sup>142</sup> The Ferguson treaties convinced Northcott that the British presence in the newly created Black Volta District was valid.<sup>143</sup>

### Civilizing (the) Chiefs

The human and economic development of the Northern Territories relied upon the British perception that hierarchies existed between chiefly and non-chiefly societies in the savannah. The administration continually emphasized their intention to support strong centralized regions as locations of secure Native Administration. For instance, Acting Governor of the Gold Coast Bryan confirmed in 1905 the British strategy of “supporting and emphasizing the position of the paramount native chiefs while, at the same time, making them realize their responsibilities, [as] the only practicable system of administering this country.”<sup>144</sup> The power of centralized government was only the beginning to a multi-faceted approach to institute change in the protectorate. Applied to protectorate rule, state-power was “only one element, albeit a rather important one, in a

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<sup>139</sup> This was one outcome of the Berlin Conference in 1884-5, which outlined the rush of European countries to divide Africa and other imperial fringes of power. See Young 30-31.

<sup>140</sup> Arhin, xvi.

<sup>141</sup> Ferguson to Griffith, Secret Memoranda, African (West) No. 448, p. 35. Metcalfe, 455.

<sup>142</sup> Arhin, xviii, 101.

<sup>143</sup> Gold Coast Conf., Lieut-Colonel Northcott to Colonial Secretary, March 2 1898, para. 2. PRO.

<sup>144</sup> *ARNT*, 1905, 3.

multiple network of actors, organizations, and enterprises.”<sup>145</sup> With chiefs responsible for local security, the British hoped to create new markets and “desires” for new material luxuries, such as clothing, as an outward sign of civilization.<sup>146</sup> The desire to sustain new markets in the protectorate clearly illustrated how the colonizers relied on a complex of tactics to create a modern society.

However, it was during the close, collaborative relationship between the District Commissioners and chiefly rulers that the British could more fully articulate the civilizing mission. Writing in 1934, anthropologist Meyer Fortes reflected on the “all-powerful dispenser of impartial justice” that emerged in the person of the British administrator working in the protectorate. “The District Commissioner,” Fortes explained, was “in direct communication with the chiefs. To them he gives his orders and states his opinions. [The chiefs] are the organs by which [the District Commissioner] acts upon the rest of the community.”<sup>147</sup> The structure of colonial administration hinged on the link between district commissioners and paramount chiefs. The district commissioners in each province of the Northern Territories received directives from the governor of the protectorate in Tamale. On the African side of the arrangement, in the Native Administrations, the paramount chief was both the agent of government and the traditional paramount authority over subordinate district chiefs their individual village heads.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Jonathan Xavier Inda, “Analytics of the Modern: An Introduction,” pp. 1-22 in *Anthropologies of Power*, Jonathan Xavier Inda ed., (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 1.

<sup>146</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol. II*, 220; Acting Police Magistrate to Acting Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, cited in Enid Schildgrout, “Government and Chiefs in Kumasi Zongo,” in *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status Under Colonial Rule and Independence*, Michael Crowder and Obaro Ikime eds., (Ife: University Press, 1979), 370.

<sup>147</sup> Meyer Fortes, “Culture Contact as a Dynamic Process,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* Vol., 9 No., 1 (1936): 27.

<sup>148</sup> Michael Crowder and Obara Ibime, “Introduction.” xviii.

The directives of the administration that were bound up in this hierarchy transferred the beliefs and assumptions that emphasized and reproduced the colonized's inferiority to the British. This, in turn, the British remedied by modeling and creating European behaviors, institutions of power, and other social "masks" that the colonized figuratively wore.<sup>149</sup> The transfer of culture between the British ruler and the African subject in this arrangement constructed the European image as modern and civilized and the African image as primitive and savage—it was the civilizing process. Catherine Hall, an influential contemporary researcher into the internalization of British colonial rule, further explained that to "civilize subjects," the British "required particular disciplines too, particular frames of mind and fields of vision as well as ... new identities demarcated for those who were ruling as well as those who were ruled."<sup>150</sup> In this way, the mutual construction of identity for both colonizer and colonized was a self-enforcing rationale for British action in West Africa.

The luxuries of civilization accompanied the growth of commercial agriculture and played a key role in changing the thinking of Africans to include modern consumption habits. Ferguson pointed out that a main British interest in extending its presence north of Ashanti was to manage a series of commercial outposts located on caravan roads controlled by key chieftaincies.<sup>151</sup> From these overseas positions, British manufacturers could sell their finished products while exporting local raw materials to European industries:

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<sup>149</sup> Franz Fanon argued that colonized Africans dealt with their feelings of inferiority by wearing 'white masks'—a metaphor for, among other behaviors, learning and speaking the language of the colonizer and other symbols of modernity. While Fanon proposed that this 'civilizing act' happened in a chanced visit to the metropole, the policy strategy of colonizers actually sought to produce the same process in the colony. See Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* trans., Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

<sup>150</sup> Catherine Hall, "William Knibb and the constitution of the new Black subject," in *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850* eds., Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern (Pennsylvania: University Press, 1999), 303.

<sup>151</sup> Arhin, 99.

Now it is only by extending our influence northwards and introducing the *luxuries of civilization* to them that we can hope to create a necessity for our goods. Powder, guns, kola-nuts, rum, gin, brass and copper rods, flint, beads, will sell well. Cotton goods must be produced thick in texture, good in quality, and low in price, to replace native manufacture... We must develop the resources of those countries by showing the tribes articles such as gum, shea-butter, and other products which will be acceptable to us for exports.<sup>152</sup>

British administrators saw their greatest early economic successes developing among the chiefly led communities. Morris happily reported the cooperation with the “chiefs” of Mamprussi, Dagomba, Gonja, Kintampo, Bole, Wa, and Grunshi in the recent census of the Northern Territories. The areas that the British saw as peaceful chieftaincies were also candidates for the beginning infrastructure to support future economic growth. For example, Morris explained that the transportation of mining equipment to the north would develop the Volta River as a transport route to trading centers at Gambaga and Kintampo, townships controlled by chiefly rulers.<sup>153</sup>

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, administrators began working towards reordering the consumptions of Africans in the savannah by developing cash-based markets to replace subsistence farming. They established “The Trade Goods Stores” first in districts where they experienced amiable relations with compliant chiefs.<sup>154</sup> Chief Commissioner Northcott established the scheme in 1898 to gradually replace bartering with modern cash selling for profit.<sup>155</sup> By 1901, Gold Coast Governor, Major Nathan, advised the Colonial Office to persevere in supporting the various stores, especially in Wa that had recently fallen into neglect.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Emphasis mine. Arhin, 78.

<sup>153</sup> *ARNT*, 1901, 12.

<sup>154</sup> *ARNT*, 1904, 4.

<sup>155</sup> *ARNT*, 1904, 4.

<sup>156</sup> *ARNT*, 1901, 5.

The administrative successes with chiefly areas reflected Ferguson's assurance of the superiority of centralized authority. Commissioners expressed the idea that most of the chiefs of the protectorate recognized the benefits of keeping looters at bay—a further sign of the supposedly advanced nature of chiefly lineages. Watherston asserted that many of the “paramount chiefs” throughout the districts were inclined to cooperate with their counterpart British Commissioners in order to ensure their prosperity. Watherston hoped that local tribes would “consolidate themselves under a chief of good reputation” and hasten the stability of the area and encourage the development of outside traders.<sup>157</sup>

The British also saw chiefly districts as orderly candidates for productive revenue streams. The effort to create taxation schemes founded on the perceived authority of the chief in the protectorate was a classic strategy for the British to gather finances and signal their absolute control. The political connection between the British administrator and African chiefs in the tax arrangement set into motion the problems associated with indirect rule that the Colonial Office would wrestle with in later decades. Unrestrained power over the peasantry, contends Mahmood Mamdani, was the result of rule through chiefs:

It is the chief who has the right to make a bylaw governing his locality, who assesses the value of your petty property and therefore how much tax you pay, who comes to collect that tax, who fines you if you fail to pay that tax, who jails you if you fail to pay the tax and the fine, who decides where you labor when in jail, and who releases you upon termination of the sentence. The chief is the petty legislator, administrator, judge, and policemen all in one.<sup>158</sup>

Thus, the British imposition of taxation in the above relationship relied upon the security and cooperation found in chiefly areas, such as in Dagomba. The accumulation of power

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<sup>157</sup> ARNT, 1905, 7.

<sup>158</sup> Mamdani, 54.

to chieftaincies in the Northern Territories, greatly increased by British backing, was immense.

Noting recent agreements with Dagomba, Governor Nathan recommended to Chamberlain that the Colonial Office station an officer at Salaga to collect tax revenue.<sup>159</sup> From similarly secure locations—namely, from chieftaincy areas—commissioners recognized the financial and administrative currency of successful systems of taxation. As in previous years, Bryan wrote to Chamberlain that local traders have accepted the Caravan Tax as a means to protect themselves from “the extortions of petty chiefs and serve in some sense as a guarantee of respectability.”<sup>160</sup> The paper receipt merchants received after paying the tariff on trade routes signaled a professional association with Europeans that subsequently increased the credibility of the itinerant traders to other Africans. However, having enough staff in the protectorate was an early problem to Morris, who in 1901 expressed the need for more officers to enforce the tax at Tumu, Bole, Walewale, and Salaga: “I desire to point out that the amount to be realized from the collection of caravan taxes altogether depends on the number of officers at one’s disposal.”<sup>161</sup> Watherston reported that the textile trade via Hausa traders has increased dramatically, with many natives “quite suddenly developing a desire to cover themselves.”<sup>162</sup> In a reference to the decades old myth of the interior, he also recognized that recent increases in mercantile activity among Muslim traders had done “more to bring about order, decency, and a local cleanliness than years of our administration have

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<sup>159</sup> *ARNT*, 1901, 4.

<sup>160</sup> *ARNT*, 1905, 4; Phyllis Ferguson and Ivor Wilks, “Chiefs, Constitutions and the British In Northern Ghana,” pp. 326-396 in *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status Under Colonial Rule and Independence*, Michael Crowder and Obaro Ikime eds., (Ife: University Press, 1979), 333.

<sup>161</sup> *ARNT*, 1901, 7.

<sup>162</sup> *ARNT*, 1905, 8.



effected.”<sup>163</sup> With the increases in trading activity, the benefits of a tax on caravan traffic were obvious.

The British increasingly prohibited the slave raiding of chiefly groups into non-chiefly areas as an important aspect of creating law and order in the Northern Territories. Colonial authorities recognized that maintaining their hold over the region depended on routine visits to all districts of the new protectorate. For example, in the Chief Commissioner’s 1901 report, Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Morris wrote that kidnappings and other crimes persisted most in areas where his staff had difficulty in traveling.<sup>164</sup> Conversely, when British officers habitually visited powerful chiefs, such as in Dagbon, criminal activity in the area seemed to diminish. For example, for reasons not discussed in the annual reports, by 1901 the Dagomba had submitted to British authorities; and as a result, Morris happily reported that slave raiding and looting activity surrounding Gambaga had ceased.<sup>165</sup>

Ferguson stressed that the relative lack of real chiefs required the British to deploy the military to further help convince Africans about the legitimacy of British control over the Northern Territories. His observations about the north uncomfortably showed the Colonial Office that the many non-chiefly groups strongly contrasted British expectations of a Muslim north. Quite the opposite, Ferguson described many individuals belonging to non-chiefly communities as polytheists, naked, decorated with body piercing of straw and beads, and living in loose associations of family compounds. He commented that even the sparing use of leaves or textile for clothing among various families of the “Gurunshi”

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<sup>163</sup> *ARNT*, 1905, 7.

<sup>164</sup> *ARNT*, 1901, Morris to Nathan, 6.

<sup>165</sup> *ARNT*, 1901, 7.

indicated the “luxuries of civilization.”<sup>166</sup> In traveling throughout the savannah, Ferguson distinguished between chiefly groups and the “Barbarous tribes” of non-chiefly regions that included the “Pampamba, Kusasi, Busansi, Grunshi, Lobi, Dafina, Nieniege, and Kaprisis.”<sup>167</sup>

Ferguson estimated that the majority of non-chiefly communities lived closest to the British sphere of influence compared to the German and French. As such, he recommended that the Colonial Office quickly deploy military forces to stake the British claim over the scattered tribes.<sup>168</sup> “As a tribe or district,” wrote Ferguson, “none of them is capable of negotiating with a European power, and can only be civilized by force of arms.” In response to this categorization, the British resorted to other persuasions, namely, “jail sentences and the Maxim,” to gain control over areas without centralized authority.<sup>169</sup> For instance, Northcott instructed Major Walker to respond decisively against possible difficulties the military encountered in any area of the district. “Make a display of force,” he ordered to the district officer, “sufficient to make apparent the hopelessness of resistance.”<sup>170</sup>

The British view of non-chiefly areas as stumbling blocks to establishing European law and order confirmed Ferguson’s positive assessment of chieftaincy. But, the convenient image of partnership was not a relationship of equity between builders of a true human community, either in chiefly or non-chiefly societies of the savannah. Acting Chief Commissioner Irvine echoed previous reports that sporadic caravan raiding was a problem in the Lobi-Dagarti District. Irvine highlighted the lack of centralized

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<sup>166</sup> Arhin, 76.

<sup>167</sup> Arhin, 100.

<sup>168</sup> Arhin, 101.

<sup>169</sup> Arhin, 100; Goody, 241.

<sup>170</sup> Gold Coast Conf., Lieut-Colonel Northcott to Colonial Secretary, 2 March 1898, para. 4. British National Archives.

leadership with the Lobi-Dagarti as the reason his staff were unable to curb what the administration typified as criminal, or uncivilized, activity.<sup>171</sup> The prevailing strategy of the administration since 1898 was to punish African chiefs who did not prevent serious crimes, such as murder and theft, from occurring in their communities. “In dealing with reluctant chiefs,” Northcott instructed to Walker, “you will resort to fines, either in corn or in kind, but in extreme cases you may suspend the chief or detain him in custody.”<sup>172</sup> As such, Irvine explained to Bryan that chiefs played an essential part in the maintenance of law and order in the protectorate—even if it meant issuing fines or other inducements.<sup>173</sup> These comments are interesting considering that obedience in response to the British military was the real deciding factor in maintaining law and order, despite the British rhetoric showcasing chieftaincy as the means to controlling the protectorate. As will become clear below, the British dealt with non-chiefly groups and supposedly superior but “reluctant” chiefs both in the same manner: control through “force of arms.” Thus, colonial rule began a deprivation of power in chiefly zones: “The colonized has no way out of his state of woe—neither a legal outlet (naturalization) nor a religious outlet (conversion). The colonized is not free to choose between being colonized or not being colonized.”<sup>174</sup> In the end, chiefs were only superior Africans to the British when they obeyed the law.

The new century brought the British into a new era of colonial control in West Africa. The administration entrenched themselves in the Northern Territories first by force, but then by a series of Native Administrations rooted in the chiefly office, having

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<sup>171</sup> *ARNT*, 1904, 5.

<sup>172</sup> Northcott to Walker, Gold Coast Confidential 182, February 1 1898, para. 10. PRO.

<sup>173</sup> *ARNT*, 1904, 6.

<sup>174</sup> Albert Memmi, “Mythical Portrait of the Colonized,” 684-689 in *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol., II* (London: Routledge, 2000), 687.

realizing their assumptions about a Muslim north in the region were misplaced. Into the 1920s, the British hold on chieftaincies increased, and colonial policy worked towards systems of indirect rule by even appointing chiefly rulers for most of the savannah that were without traditions of chiefly authority.

### Chapter 3 – The Civil Administration

The Muslim influence in the savannah remained a powerful factor in convincing administrative writers to see chieftaincy groups as a positive representation of civilization. This chapter focuses on how the British used this version of local history to further a perception of a divide between decentralized and centralized communities. By repeating the dichotomy between chiefly and non-chiefly groups in their writing, a succession of commissioners represented chiefly areas as youthful, model districts eager to cooperate with British officials. In contrast, non-chiefly areas more clearly appeared to authorities as wild, uncooperative sectors. In turn, the British worked towards establishing rest houses and increasing routine visits to non-chiefly districts to enforce law and order. While indirect rule intended to embrace tradition, the policy only aimed to preserve customs colonizers believed were useful for ensuring total control.

The retelling of Muslim history in the savannah recalled the Orientalist trend of rehearsing knowledge over time, a process with the potential to create new forms of reality. For instance, in his 1920 book, *The Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast*, A. W. Cardinal, the Commissioner for Karachi District, reflected the orthodox view of the administration towards chiefly and non-chiefly societies contained in the annual reports. His book reflected over twenty years of British involvement in the Northern Territories and examined the historical and anthropological images of natives under colonial rule. For his study, Cardinal drew upon lengthy quotes from the influential British author James Frazer to understand the local Arabic histories of Dagomba.<sup>175</sup> After years of comparing non-European cultures throughout the European colonial frontier,

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<sup>175</sup> James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion Vol. I*, 1890, Abridged Ed., (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976).

Frazer concluded that literacy and the division between secular and spiritual authorities indicated human progress. The culmination of such knowledge became influential to British policymakers in the savannah. The British saw these supposedly progressive attributes as common features of the few chiefly led regions of the savannah. The Arabic manuscripts showed how Islamic chiefs supplanted the authority of tindana, an illiterate class of spiritualist earth-priests that allowed for communal forms of landownership. In embracing Fraser's ideas about human progress, Cardinal held to the British administrative view that Muslim immigration into the savannah elevated local society by subjugating the superstitious beliefs of tribal Africa.

The annual reports from the protectorate confirmed how the British organized their new bureaucracy around the belief that chiefly groups could facilitate peace and order as a prerequisite to the civilizing mission. The strategic goal of colonial rule depended on the British successfully employing a variety of means designed to reorient Africans around believing their own inferiority compared to the greater culture of the British Empire. By overseeing the authority structure of native courts, for instance, the British tried to change individuals to think and act out the idea of an ordered, modern European identity.

#### The Divide Between Chiefly and Non-Chiefly Society

The British interpreted a variety of effects that Islam brought to the savannah as signals of cultural progress away from typically backward savannah culture.<sup>176</sup> In studying the chiefly realms of the Northern Territories, such as in Dagomba and Mamprussi, District Commissioner Cardinal consulted French translations of the *Tarikh-es-Soudan* and *Tarikh-el-Fettch*. These seventeenth century Arabic manuscripts described

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<sup>176</sup> Lentz, 24, 52.

more than two hundred years of Islamic oral and written history stretching across the West African Sudan.<sup>177</sup> Yet, like Ferguson's report on the savannah two decades previous, Cardinal dispelled any ideas of a Muslim dominated Northern Territory. Instead, Cardinal confirmed that "devout" Muslims comprised less than two percent of the protectorate located mainly in the southern districts of Salaga, Tamale, Gambaga, Bole, and Wa, and in the northern provinces of Gurupisi, Nasa, and Wahabu.<sup>178</sup> Despite recording Islam's small numerical showing in the protectorate census, the British continued to see links between a historic Islamic presence and chieftaincy and of the benefits of chiefly rule in general. One obvious indication was the influx of literacy in Arabic among chiefly societies. The British perceived other markers closely linked to a centralizing trend that seemed to accompany chiefly rule. These included the supplanting of earth-priests with chiefs as the holders of ultimate authority over politics, law, and landownership. Centralization also brought chieftaincies military supremacy over non-chiefly groups, which the British paradoxically admired as a sign of greatness but also recognized as the root of much of the political and social disorder in the protectorate.

During the first years of British military occupation in the north, a succession of Chief Commissioners began the bureaucratic routine of reporting to the Colonial Office in London, via the Governor in Cape Coast, about the policies, attitudes, difficulties, successes, and experiences of the northern administration. The notion that chieftaincies were civilizationally superior to non-chiefly groups was an essential theme of the opening years of administrative reporting from the Northern Territories. These highly organized

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<sup>177</sup> A. W. Cardinal, *The Natives of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast* (Accra: Gold Coast, 1920), 2.

<sup>178</sup> Cardinal, x.

and detailed summaries highlighted the ongoing British representation of the Dagomba, Gonja, Wa, and Mamprussi chieftaincies as dominant colonial districts.<sup>179</sup>

The administration claimed chieftaincy regions were advanced, compliant, and secure districts to integrate youth, especially from non-chiefly groups, into civilizing activities that included military service and capitalist market structures. Establishing a coherent colonial regime based on a vision of relative superiority required the systemized understanding of savannah culture and history. The British could then catalogue their views about the order, legal code, and structure of the protectorate. The transformation of British imaginings about ethnicity into realities immortalized in colonial policy illustrated the power of the colonial imagination in creating new identities and hierarchies. As Benedict Anderson has described it, “the flow of subject populations through the mesh of differential schools, courts, clinics, police stations and immigration offices created traffic habits which in time gave real social life to the state’s earlier fantasies.”<sup>180</sup>

The idea that chieftaincy was a secular form of authority helped Cardinal believe chiefly groups were superior to the superstitious earth-shrines of non-chiefly areas. Cardinal saw chieftaincy confirming the broader global anthropological argument put forward by Frazer that secular authority was more evolved than spiritual bases for political power. Yet, Cardinal was reacting to an alien form of spirituality that, like most other European travelers outside of the continent, he did not understand and could not adequately judge. In this way, colonizers never or rarely appreciated Africans for their own merits, but only used their research to justify programs of “urgent change.”<sup>181</sup> The failure to begin an intercultural discussion to understand real Africans caused British

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<sup>179</sup> *ARNT*, 1901, 11.

<sup>180</sup> Benedict Anderson, “Census, Map, Museum,” pp.592-609 in *Postcolonialism: Critical concepts in literary and cultural studies Vol., II*, Diana Brydon ed., (London: Routledge, 2005), 596.

<sup>181</sup> Memmi, 686.



officers like Cardinal to label the earth-shrine as a primitive superstition over inanimate objects.<sup>182</sup> Opposing terms like secular and superstitious; literate and illiterate; centralized and decentralized; young and old; and resistor and obedient became central to how colonizers ranked Africans along a continuum of progress.

The innovation of secular power in the Northern Territories, wrote Cardinal, began after a centuries old arrangement between tindanas and migrant Muslim chiefs who intermarried among a handful of non-chiefly communities.<sup>183</sup> Tindanas were the original caretakers of land whose tradition of spiritual authority predated the arrival of Muslim chieftaincies.<sup>184</sup> In a reflex fitting the Orientalist genre, Cardinal thus imagined that the separation of spiritual and temporal offices represented an evolutionary step forward. For example, he eloquently explained that Muslims were a “more vigorous race” that contrasted with the indigenous priestly orders: “from whose nerveless fingers the reins of government slipped into the firmer grasp of men who” better understood secular justifications of power.<sup>185</sup> Frazer believed the primitive societies endowed priestly classes with a measure of power over physical and spiritual realms.<sup>186</sup> The fate of the tribe lay with the will of the tindana who controlled the spirits inhabiting earthly objects. As a result, the village would punish or reward the king as the cause of either destitution or prosperity.<sup>187</sup> Hence, British officers, who were more acquainted with Islamic tradition than the religion of the savannah, put aside their usual negative opinions of Muslims to praise their supposedly positive cultural influence.

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<sup>182</sup> Curtin, 407.

<sup>183</sup> Cardinal, 60

<sup>184</sup> Cardinal, 16.

<sup>185</sup> Frazer, 203.

<sup>186</sup> Frazer, 194.

<sup>187</sup> Frazer, 198.

## Literate and Illiterate

The British also interpreted signs of literacy in Arabic among chiefly communities as a sign of progress. In turn, the differing rates of literacy among chiefly and non-chiefly communities shaped education as a civilizing tool in the savannah. The policy towards education and literacy matched British attitudes to native authorities, which the colonial officials tried either to strengthen or introduce. Similarly, the British responded to signs of literacy by training chiefly lineages in the English language to serve the British staff as clerks in addition to acting as colonial mediators as chiefs.

For example, in 1909, the protectorate administration benefited from placing the first Government School in Tamale (Dagomba). The location of the school in the political center of Dagbon capitalized upon the British optimism for Dagomba. With a history of chiefly rule and an emphasis on Arabic writing and monotheism, the Dagomba appeared to the British as more civilized compared to the non-chiefly and illiterate groups of the interior. By deepening the scholarly tradition in Dagomba, the British hoped to employ the best of its students in various clerical, postal, and agricultural stations in the north.<sup>188</sup> British treasury officers emphasized the importance of integrating a native treasury system with the “Emir” and the “principle executive officer” of the aristocracy, “in this case in Arabic with scribes learned in English.”<sup>189</sup> Chief Commissioner Armitage also intended his staff to establish new Government Schools in other chiefly townships influenced by Imams, such as in Wa and Bole. By 1916, Armitage wrote that enrolment at Gambaga School increased one hundred percent largely from Mamprussi and Bawku

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<sup>188</sup> Roger G. Thomas, “Education in Northern Ghana, 1906-1940: A Study in Colonial Paradox,” *The International Journal of African Studies* Vol., 7 No., 3 (1979): 429-430.

<sup>189</sup> Note on a method of accounting in a native treasury, NRG 8/2/5. NAGT.

students, areas typified by Islamic belief.<sup>190</sup> Also, in the town of Bole, the resident Chief asked the British to construct a school in the District, which only seemed to convince the British that chiefly groups were progressive.<sup>191</sup>

The British faced harder work in their mission to the illiterate communities of the protectorate. Conversely, station officers had greater roles as educators “in less developed units or where there were no responsible Emir[s].”<sup>192</sup> In these non-chiefly districts, administrators hoped to draw villagers into English language education to begin the foundational training towards creating native authorities to serve the British regime.<sup>193</sup> Part of the reason for introducing education into the savannah was the long-term hope for the British to train chiefs as mediators of internal tribal disputes. In this way, the British could overwrite a new civilizing script in the minds of Africans that introduced modern European values, including those of individual property ownership, abolition, marriage, and African legal systems.<sup>194</sup> However, Chief Commissioner Watherston recognized an apparent obstacle to this strategy in non-chiefly societies. Mainly, the apparent lack of a widespread system of chiefly rule indicated to him that non-chiefly districts did not have a unified legal system. Even with education provided by his staff, Watherston also complained about the seeming “imbecility” of the many “elected chiefs” from non-chiefly societies. In his view, Watherston estimated that it would take two generations before “useful” chiefs appeared in non-chiefly communities. His comment seemed to measure the duration his administration would remain as an

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<sup>190</sup> *ARNT*, 1916, 8.

<sup>191</sup> *ARNT*, 1916, 8.

<sup>192</sup> C. L. Temple, Governor’s Deputy, 14 July 1916, *Note On A Method of Accounting in a Native Treasury*, 3, Circular No. 486P/1916, British National Archives.

<sup>193</sup> *ARNT*, 1907, 11.

<sup>194</sup> Lentz, 136-137.

attentive “watchdog” over African society, while ready to excise the parts of local culture that “were repugnant to Western civilization,” such as slavery.<sup>195</sup>

The belief that chiefs exercised legal jurisdiction over their communities also influenced the British to see chieftaincies as superior to the supposedly lawless non-chiefly zones. The British largely hoped their field officers would have to have little daily influence in resolving local disputes. They hoped local chiefs would learn and obey British “ideas of justice and equity.” For instance, in 1914, Armitage wanted African rulers to keep appeals to government about “civil actions” to a minimum:

Every encouragement has been given to the Chiefs to exercise their authority, to hear and determine cases relating to native property, marriage, and other civil actions, and to uphold native laws and customs, so long as they are not opposed to our ideas of justice and equity. Few appeals from decisions of the Chiefs are made to the Commissioners’ Courts, and, as a rule, local authority is exercised with greatest moderation.<sup>196</sup>

Thus, utilizing native legal systems in this manner was another tactic of the British civilizing mission. By vetoing the African “laws and customs” that appeared contrary to the British version, the colonial regime could change and re-create a modern form of ethic in the savannah.

### Military Strength and Weakness

The British further believed that regional military strength indicated the superiority of chiefly groups over non-chiefly societies. The dominant military position of chieftaincies in turn helped convince Cardinal and other administrators that chiefs were ideal collaborators for British policy intending to hasten the “slow process of evolution” in the Northern Territories.<sup>197</sup> His philosophy towards partnering with chiefs revealed the British emphasis on exercising military and political dominance in the

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<sup>195</sup> ARNT, 1907, 8; Michael Crowder, *Colonial West Africa*, (London: Frank Cass Co. Ltd., 1979), 139.

<sup>196</sup> ARNT, 1914, 14.

<sup>197</sup> Cardinal, 21.

protectorate to achieve their strategic civilizing goals.<sup>198</sup> The main indication of the military prowess of chieftaincies was the instances of slave raiding of chiefly groups in the Grunshi areas. The view that non-chiefly communities were victims of chiefly groups consequently helped shape the British intention to institute chiefly authority over decentralized areas. While the English government reversed their support of slavery in 1807, calling it a “sin against God,” in 1907 they nevertheless found some legitimacy for supporting chieftaincy on the basis of their slaving past.<sup>199</sup> The paradox between the British abolition of slavery and their support of historically slaving ethnic groups clearly illustrated Mamdani’s view that British colonialism was a series of “diverse” and “contradictory” inclinations.<sup>200</sup>

Nevertheless, in the outward relationship of power between chiefly and non-chiefly groups, Cardinal saw a justification for the British policy of placing non-chiefly peoples under the power of traditionally superior chiefly groups. At first, the history of the tribal relationship was not a continuous narrative of ascendant Muslim warlords. The Arabic manuscripts instead revealed to Cardinal the initial rise of Dagomba, Moshi, and Mamprussi chiefly power as “a more or less peaceful penetration by bands of exiles, fugitives, and robbers.”<sup>201</sup> However, the seemingly peaceful nature of chiefly rule must have changed by the late nineteenth century. Cardinal pointed out Dagomba chiefs had in recent decades pillaged the many “independent [or non-chiefly] tribes,” such as the Grunshi, Busansi, Konkomba, and Tchokossi, for slaves.<sup>202</sup> Also referring to the earlier writing of Dupuis, Cardinal identified slaves from the above non-chiefly tribes as

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<sup>198</sup> “Colonies were territories of European settlement. In contrast, the territories of European domination—but not of settlement—were known as protectorates.” Mamdani, 17.

<sup>199</sup> Crowder, *Colonial West Africa*, 8.

<sup>200</sup> Mamdani, 39.

<sup>201</sup> Cardinal, 9.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

payments to the Asante King in the yearly tribute from Dagomba.<sup>203</sup> After the 1860s, petty Dagomba chiefs routinely employed Zabarma mercenaries living to the northeast of Fadi N’Gurma, in Moshi, to ensure routine payments to the Ashanti.

Commissioners viewed slave raiding as corroding the development of civilization in the Northern Territories. Yet, in holding this view, the British overlooked the contradiction that their own strategic civilizing goals were also disruptive to the natural order of the savannah—unless the natural development of society in West Africa depended on the frequent intervention of a foreign military force. The colonial administration in the protectorate was attempting rapid and often violent historical change. Yet, British officials were steeped in the British tradition of history, which thought political change best occurred gradually; conversely, violent changes, such as those introduced by Babatu and Samory, were un-natural disturbances to development.<sup>204</sup>

True, the disruptive effects of the Muslim slave-raiders, Samory and Barbatu, in the late nineteenth century were a lasting concern, even after the first decade of British occupation.<sup>205</sup> By 1912, Acting Gold Coast Governor Hugh Clifford measured success in the north in part by the degree the administration could halt slave-raiding and other forms of “inter-tribal warfare”.<sup>206</sup> The years of raiding had taken their toll on the development of the social and political structure of the savannah. Ferguson and Wilks point out that the administration also recognized Samory and Babatu, and other similarly ambitious Muslim warlords, being responsible for disrupting succession traditions in Wa and Dagomba. Consequently, the British worked at rebuilding these traditional authorities.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>204</sup> Lentz, 52.

<sup>205</sup> *ARNT*, 1907, 8.

<sup>206</sup> *ARNT*, 1912, 5.

<sup>207</sup> See Phyllis Ferguson and Ivor Wilks, 329.

The British commissioners tended to believe that the previous years of violence in these communities prevented centralized authority from evolving naturally as well as disrupting older chiefly hierarchies among those groups. For instance, Watherston blamed Samory and Babatu for the lack of paramount chiefs among the Lobis, Dagartis, Grunshis, Kussassis, and other non-chiefly groups.<sup>208</sup> The administration consequently spent much energy dealing with the effects of Muslim slave raiding by continuing its policy of “enlarging the size and reducing the number” of ethnic communities into the next decade.<sup>209</sup> Watherston advocated that his administration continue its policy of appointing paramount chiefs in communities where they appeared absent or ineffective: “Much trouble has been taken to divide these people up into their original divisions, and to come under the paramount chiefs whom they were in the habit of obeying before Samory and Barbatu overran the country.”<sup>210</sup>

The view that chiefly communities like Dagomba were militarily superior also helped the British to locate institutions of colonial power in chiefly areas. Enlistment into the Gold Coast Regiment became a way for villagers, from the Colony and from the protectorates in the north and in Ashanti, unaccustomed to European culture to become supposedly civilized. Naturally, the British believed that recruits from distant non-chiefly communities of the protectorate had greater challenges adjusting to military life than Africans who had longer exposure to British rule. Armitage hoped that establishing a training center in Tamale would curtail desertions from newly minted soldiers who experienced ridicule from the soldiers arriving to Kumasi from the Gold Coast and Ashanti Region. Thus, in 1917, Tamale became a staging ground for the Gold Coast

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<sup>208</sup> *ARNT*, 1907, 9.

<sup>209</sup> Colin. W. Newbury, *The West African Commonwealth*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1964), 3-4.

<sup>210</sup> *ARNT*, 1907, 11.

Regiment for recruits from the backward districts of the Northern Territories, such as from the North-East Province.<sup>211</sup> Armitage reasoned that while temporarily barracked at Tamale, the “untutored savages” from the North-East Province would learn to wear uniforms and eat food more available in the south.<sup>212</sup> When Britain eventually discharged these African soldiers after the armistice, Armitage wrote that over a thousand “high spirited” youth returned to their families and disrespected their “bush men” chiefs and mocked their brothers who remained in the villages.<sup>213</sup> He seemed to predict the post-war disruptions from the cash-laden youth who “could not be expected to pass without incident” as they returned home having living a disciplined, paid soldiers life.<sup>214</sup> However, the nature of the turbulence clearly centered on the feelings of superiority among the youth who adopted the perspective of the British about the supposed backwardness of their northern heritage.

#### Chiefly Landlords vs. Priestly Caretakers

The belief that chieftaincies were superior communities was also related to the negative view that the British had of tindanas. But Cardinal welcomed Frazer’s negative view of communal land use to interpret the *Tariq es Soudan*, the Arabic manuscript from Timbuktu that described Muslim settlements in the savannah. Drawing from Frazer’s *Folk-lore in the Old Testament* to read the Muslim texts, he underscored “communal or tribal” modes of farming as inferior compared to the individually owned land practices of Muslim chiefs.<sup>215</sup> The Arabic histories claimed their West African patriarchs rarely intended to disturb the spiritual connection they encountered between tindanas and the

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<sup>211</sup> ARNT, 1917, 11.

<sup>212</sup> ARNT, 1918, 18.

<sup>213</sup> ARNT, 1918, 19.

<sup>214</sup> ARNT, 1918, 19.

<sup>215</sup> Cardinal, 59.



communities of family compounds. Yet, in the end, the Muslim forefathers of Dagomba and other chiefly groups imposed their secular approach to authority over the cultural fabric of the societies they encountered in the savannah.<sup>216</sup>

The belief that chiefs were powerful landowners underpinned the British initial hope to develop the Northern Territories into an independent, profitable agricultural possession. As in South Africa, creating colonial frontiers into capitalist farming regions reflected the civilizing goal of ensuring that farmers marketed their products to cash-carrying consumers in a bid to “shape new desires, new exertions, new forms of wealth, even a new society.”<sup>217</sup> Underpinning all of this in the savannah required the colonial administration to emphasize that individual chiefly land tenure, and not communal land use vis a vis the tindanas, was the best means to steer local inhabitants towards using coinage to purchase locally grown food and other goods. As Levtzion pointed out, Muslim chiefs had ensured their regional power by providing security to trade routes that had connected Dagomba to Timbuktu since c.1700.<sup>218</sup>

The British used this view of native authorities to manipulate chiefs into articulating modern forms of government control, which, according to Foucault, meant, “to properly manage wealth and resources, modes of living and habitation.”<sup>219</sup> The emphasis here on the word “manage” in this context shows how British colonizers, but not African subjects, reserved the proper rights of control. Speaking optimistically about the protectorate in 1920, Cardinal highlighted what his administration perceived as the economic benefits that their relationships with chiefly landowners could produce in control:

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<sup>216</sup> Colin Newbury, *Patrons, Clients, and Empire* (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 106; Cardinal, 18.

<sup>217</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Vol. II* (Chicago: University Press, 1997), 219.

<sup>218</sup> See map, “Routes of the Volta Basin,” Appendix 3; Levtzion, 1-6.

<sup>219</sup> Jonathan Xavier Inda, 4; Mamdani, 81.

The population is there; cattle, especially sheep, thrive; the market of the Colony seems inexhaustible; the land is rich, producing grain, fibre and ground-nuts in abundance; the forest is untouched as yet with its wealth of oils, barks and gums. Beeswax, cotton, kapok, strophanthus and grasses at present find a better sale on the spot, and European purchasers cannot compete with local prices. But, above all, the people are industrious—the shortness of the farming season makes for that—and show such energy in cultivation, as well as in the local manufactures, that an Accra youth once remarked to me that these people would soon surpass in wealth and civilization the forest-folk of the Colony and Ashanti, once the question of transport is solved.<sup>220</sup>

The example shows the “hand in hand” connection between what the British saw as “furthering civilizing” in the protectorate and developing the material resources of the north.<sup>221</sup> Notice, too, how Cardinal felt creating railways and motorways was key to unlocking not just wealth but also the “civilization” of the savannah.

The notion that chiefly groups were superior West African societies underpinned the British aim to integrate non-chiefly communities into the economic and administrative infrastructure they were strengthening in chiefly groups. The British perceived in chieftaincies a well-ordered political structure able to control many civilizing benefits, such as the function of an active and well-attended market system in Dagomba. As such, in 1906, Commissioner Watherston eagerly relocated the Northern Territories central administration from Gambaga to Tamale, near the large market-township in the heart of Dagomba territory.<sup>222</sup> Watherston also declared the need to construct or refurbish roads throughout the protectorate to connect the important economic centers located in chiefly zones. These included links from Ashanti and the surrounding German and French controlled colonies into the key Muslim centers like Salaga, Gambaga, Tamale, Daboya, Navarro, and Kintampo.

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<sup>220</sup> Cardinal, xi.

<sup>221</sup> Curtin, 341.

<sup>222</sup> *ARNT*, 1906, 6.

Furthermore, trade had increased as a result of British successes against slave raiding and Watherston wanted to capitalize on the increased security in chieftaincy-controlled locations. As a result, he also noted the increased Islamic population in the protectorate and explained in detail the associated increase need for a variety of textiles, Islamic prayer beads, and similar personal articles.<sup>223</sup> Two years later, Chief Commissioner Irvine underlined to the Colonial Office the great need to develop the “weak class” of chieftaincy throughout the Northern Territories to ensure the continued success of agriculture and trade networks.<sup>224</sup> Thus, by 1910 the British began to record their relationship with the tribes of the Northern Territories increasingly under the title of developing “Trade, Agriculture, and Industry” in the protectorate.<sup>225</sup> As a sign of their initial successes, W. C. F. Robertson, Acting Gold Coast Governor, acknowledged the Northern Territories as the primary point of transit for the trade in cattle to both the Ivory Coast and into Ashanti as well as to the Colony.<sup>226</sup>

As the 1920s began, the Chief Commissioner, Arthur Philbrick, indicated that his administration finally completed a useable motorway network linking Kumasi to the districts in the north. The road seemed to also signify successful British control by allowing their physical presence throughout the protectorate, as well as connecting northern markets to the south. For instance, by permitting the Gold Coast Governor to travel to Zouaragu, Navarro, Sandema, and Bawku, areas that for years were the locations of ongoing resistance to colonial rule, Philbrick calmed fears among the Colonial Office that its efforts to civilize the north would fail.<sup>227</sup> The successful construction of

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<sup>223</sup> *ARNT*, 1906, 7.

<sup>224</sup> *ARNT*, 1908, 5.

<sup>225</sup> *ARNT*, 1910, 6.

<sup>226</sup> *ARNT*, 1913, 3.

<sup>227</sup> *ARNT*, 1921, 14.

infrastructure in the protectorate thus measured the level of British confidence in chiefly rulers providing the local security for the British initiatives. Consequently, the British felt the need for regional security greatest in the areas of the protectorate without perceivable native authorities.

### Hostility and Obedience

Africans met the prospects of British control with varying degrees of collaboration and strategies of resistance. The British reported that some African subjects began using the status symbols of the administration to increase their material standing in the new order. Appearing Muslim or claiming Islamic faith to the British was one method Africans increased or gained the approval of the whites. In 1911, Chief Commissioner Armitage reported that Africans professed Islam to staff officers, but he indicated that these displays were likely superficial and due more to ulterior motives.<sup>228</sup> For instance, chiefs, and especially their apparent Muslim attendants, in the protectorate received financial assistance that corresponded to their level of civilization. By 1916, the British staff structured a salary plan for chiefs according to the “stage of development” of their community.<sup>229</sup> As such, commissioners awarded higher salaries to the “native officials” in districts the administration labeled as “fully organized.”<sup>230</sup> The paramount chiefs, headmen, and Muslim scribes from prominent chieftaincies, like Mamprussi, Dagomba, and Gonja, received the highest yearly wage. Interestingly, the Native Treasury record in this scheme revealed that British officers in the protectorate referred to paramount chiefs as Muslim “Emirs”; similarly, his closest assistant the British labeled “Waziri,” the

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<sup>228</sup> *ARNT*, 1911, 15.

<sup>229</sup> C. L. Temple, Governor’s Deputy, 14 July 1916, Circular No. 486P/1916, 1. PRO.

<sup>230</sup> C. L. Temple, Governor’s Deputy, 14 July 1916, Circular No. 486P/1916, 1. PRO.

traditional Hausa tax collector, judicial officer, and second in command.<sup>231232</sup> Cardinal's time, enterprising villagers often claimed to be from Mamprussi or Moshi by attempting to speak Hausa (Arabic), professing Islamic belief, wearing Muslim-styled clothing, and riding horses in order to increase their status among officials.

Another example of the colonized using British perceptions surrounded the public claims by the Mamprussi paramount to his ascendancy over an array of non-chiefly communities of the upper northeast, such as the Yagaba, Lobi, Tallensi, and Builsa. Over the years, chiefs watched British staff build Native Courts that gave a new kind of legal status to chiefly hierarchies the British perceived to exist in the savannah.<sup>233</sup> The Mamprussi Na played into the British need to foster security and stability through chiefs in order to increase his political influence. Reports to the Colonial Office in 1911 stating that the Mamprussi Chief recently acquired loyalty of all the "chiefs" in the North-Eastern Province was a reassuring sign about of the potency of chiefly rule and the accompanying support from the British administration.<sup>234</sup> Chief Commissioner Irvine stated that the Mamprussi chief had accompanied a routine British administrative visit to the province, a location of many decentralized communities of the protectorate. During the stop, the Mamprussi Na spontaneously informed the commissioner and the assembled locals of his longstanding authority over the region.<sup>235</sup> The British received this claim uncritically, needing to see a native solution to the longstanding problem of resistance that the administration endured in the North-West Province. After 1911, the Mamprussi became another model chiefly authority to the British, who praised the Mamprussi

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<sup>231</sup> C. L. Temple, Governor's Deputy, 1. PRO; Frank Salamone, "The Waziri and the Thief: Hausa Islamic Law in a Yoruba City," *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* No., 42 (1998), 147. 139-156.

<sup>232</sup> District Commissioner's Report, cited in Weiss, 21.

<sup>233</sup> Mamdani, 52.

<sup>234</sup> These included Yagaba, Lobi, Tallensi, and Builsa. See Goody, 233.

<sup>235</sup> *ARNT*, 1911, 21.

paramount and the Imam of Gambaga for supplying labor and settling “petty disputes and intrigues” throughout the Gambaga District.<sup>236</sup> The positive image of Mamprussi persisted through the decade, when the District Commissioner of Gambaga reflected on the “willing, loyal, and obedient” character of the Mamprussi.<sup>237</sup>

The ongoing resistance to colonial rule from non-chiefly districts fortified the view that decentralized communities were inferior compared to chiefly areas that routinely cooperated with British authorities. For example, resistance to British rule in the Sapari (Tong) Hills continued to plague the administration past 1909. Chief Commissioner Irvine explained away local opposition to European intervention as simple “ignorance, engendered by fear as to our intention towards them.”<sup>238</sup> Viewing defiance to British rule as proof that the non-chiefly districts were less evolved, commissioners typically responded by increasing their visits to specific villages they suspected of supporting dissenters. Commissioners could then explain in person the need for locals to accept British-appointed chiefs as their new rulers. Watherston reported, for instance, that cooperation in Lobi-Dagarti District temporarily improved as a result of chiefs agreeing to “re-organize themselves under their old paramount chiefs, instead of living as they were in independence and at constant warfare with one another.”<sup>239</sup> Thus, it was clear that the administration categorized Africans living in non-chiefly communities as uncontrollable, violent people when the British were not able to remain in the area.

The British relied on the physical presence of their administrative staff to sustain law and order in non-chiefly districts. The close positioning of British staff countered the requirements of indirect rule to rely on native chiefs to produce peace. Furthermore, it

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<sup>236</sup> *ARNT*, 1913, 24.

<sup>237</sup> *ARNT*, 1913, 23.

<sup>238</sup> *ARNT*, 1909, 8.

<sup>239</sup> *ARNT*, 1906, 5.

was the use of military force against non-chiefly zones that illustrated how quickly the Enlightenment ideal of freedom for the individual disappeared in the protectorate. Africans from chiefly and non-chiefly communities alike suffered from the “depersonalization” of British officers who needed to create spheres of homogeneity under the guise of a new civil administration in the protectorate.<sup>240</sup>

Commissioners believed that the need for their ongoing efforts to produce lasting security in the Sapari (Tong) Hills of the Zouaragu District reflected the well-entrenched primitive and lawless nature of non-chiefly societies. The commissioners continually described these non-chiefly locations as wild territories of persistent lawlessness. Stationing British outposts in non-chiefly districts created periods of peace and order by assuring villages that they were under the power of a distant chief—and the not too distant Enfield repeating rifle and Maxim machine-gun. Capitalizing on these initial achievements, Watherston reported that by the end of 1906, his staff established similar stations in Wa and Bole, areas in the Northwest Province where he saw potential for increased trade if security prevailed.<sup>241</sup> In support of Watherston, Acting Governor of the Gold Coast John Rodger reported to London his optimism that ongoing British action against the looting and generally uncooperative Lobi-Dagarti and Nabrigo Districts would create peace and order.<sup>242</sup>

Commissioner Irvine also reiterated the position that “less civilized” regions of the protectorate were ungovernable in the British mind due “probably to [a] lack of power and confidence” in their political self-determination.<sup>243</sup> The administration decided, therefore, that their immediate and enduring intervention was essential in guiding the

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<sup>240</sup> Memmi, 687.

<sup>241</sup> *ARNT*, 1906, 6.

<sup>242</sup> *ARNT*, 1906, 3.

<sup>243</sup> *ARNT*, 1911, 11.

natives towards realizing their potential. Watherston, in particular, remained positive from 1906 to his death, by fever in 1908, that the strategy of bolstering administrative outposts would quell the frustratingly persistent violence against trade caravans in the non-chiefly districts.<sup>244</sup>

The deepening confidence with and success of the few chiefly areas in the protectorate reinforced the negative view the British administration had for the more numerous non-chiefly communities. While colonial authorities characterized tindanas as unevolved political figureheads, ongoing disturbances to the peace from non-chiefly districts only enlarged the British motivation to suppress the obsolete priest-hood from functioning in the protectorate.

The British saw halting the pagan rituals of the tindana as the counterpoint to entrenching the secular authority of chiefs throughout the protectorate. To help support chiefly authority over tindanas and multiply colonial power against pockets of resistance in non-chiefly areas, the British established a new civic administrative system to govern the Northern Territories. As the previous chapter illustrates, in areas that opposed their system of law, British officers dispatched the infantry to enforce the peace. But maintaining their presence in all sectors required an established bureaucracy with the ability to deploy short-term military interventions against raids on caravans or other civil disturbances.

Therefore, in 1906, Chief Commissioner Watherston established a civil bureaucracy separate from the ongoing demands of training and recruitment for the Second Battalion Gold Coast Regiment, the main British contingent operating in the

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<sup>244</sup> *ARNT, 1906, 5; ARNT, 1907, 7; ARNT, 1908, 5.*



savannah.<sup>245</sup> In exchange for a professional military attachment, Watherston instituted the Northern Territories Constabulary Force, headquartered at Kumasi, but with stations at Gambaga, Wa, Navarro, Bole, Lorha, Tumu, Tamale, Salaga, and Yeji.<sup>246</sup> The new administration divided the Northern Territories into provinces and districts that relied upon traditional chiefly authority located in the above mentioned townships.<sup>247</sup> In this way, the primarily Muslim and economic centers of Tamale, Wa, and Tumu became respective British administrative capitals for the Southern, North-West, and North-East Provinces.<sup>248</sup>

British commissioners often resorted to military power when appointing chiefly rulers in non-chiefly areas. In 1911, Irvine finally ended the ten-year opposition in the Sapari (Tong) Hills.<sup>249</sup> In this longstanding pocket of resistance, he previously admitted that the “moral effect” of temporarily stationing a company of infantry from the Gold Coast Regiment had failed to stop caravan raiding. As a result, Irvine ordered a direct military operation against the remote hills that successfully suppressed any opposition to British authority. After the invasion, Irvine appointed paramount chiefs and sub-chiefs from among the “influential natives...of the various sections of these tribes, where none had existed.”<sup>250</sup> The British also created chiefly rulers for the neighboring Grunshi and Kanjarga. Notwithstanding these appointments, which often amplified the merely titular position of the chiefs, Irvine reported that passive resistance or non-compliance to British authority persisted.

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<sup>245</sup> *ARNT*, 1906, 6.

<sup>246</sup> *ARNT*, 1906, 10; *ARNT*, 1907, 23.

<sup>247</sup> See map, “Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, Provinces and Districts, 1907,” Appendix 4.

<sup>248</sup> *ARNT*, 1907, 6-7.

<sup>249</sup> *ARNT*, 1911, 20.

<sup>250</sup> *ARNT*, 1911, 20.

Further contrasting the confidence British staff had in chiefly sectors, Armitage shared his frustration with the backward northern provinces of the protectorate. For the most part, he relayed the continued acceptance of locals to the over-lordship of the Chief of Mamprussi that Irvine reported in 1911. Yet, in some districts of the protectorate, individuals resisted British policy by following the chiefs they respected. In the districts of Grunshi and Kanjarga, for instance, the British-appointed chiefs rejected the Mamprussi paramount chief, and instead recognized the chief of Sandema and Navarro as their paramount. In his report to the Colonial Office, Armitage attributed their non-compliance as a reflection of their essential “avaricious” nature.<sup>251</sup> Thus, without revealing any attempt to understand the real motivations Grunshi and Kanjarga had for rejecting the Mamprussi, Armitage explained that he based the decision on a typically British stereotype that non-chiefly societies were disobedient to European orders.

In 1915, Armitage reported his disappointment that unlike the compliant chiefly districts of the Southern Province, such as in Gambaga, Salaga, and Bole, the Zouaragu District Commissioner reported no public works active in his sector.<sup>252</sup> In doing so, Armitage expressed the importance the British held in requiring strong chiefly rulers to maintain peaceful and productive districts. He also cited the successes the British experienced after his predecessor, Commissioner Irvine, managed to quell the native disobedience in 1911 and install chiefly leadership in the district. In particular, Armitage happily indicated that imports and exports in the Sapari (Tong) Hills of the North-Western Province had increased.<sup>253</sup> Again, the British enjoyed these gains only when they could maintain their staff in the area. Armitage reported that the beginning of the British

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<sup>251</sup> *ARNT, 1913*, 23.

<sup>252</sup> *ARNT, 1915*, 24.

<sup>253</sup> *ARNT, 1913*, 7.

war effort in Europe depleted the administrative staff from the protectorate.<sup>254</sup> As a result, he explained that districts where British operatives were absent reverted back to their “previous lawlessness” and that many individuals rejected the British created chiefs.<sup>255</sup>

The view that tindanas were primitive spiritual figureheads underpinned the British action against earth-worship in non-chiefly districts of the northern provinces of the protectorate. For example, when continued financial restraints on the British government during the First World War forced the British resident to leave Zouaragu District, Armitage pointed out that the tindana living in the Sapari (Tong) Hills reinstated the earth-shrine observance, or fetish. Previously, in 1911, a major objective of the operation in the Tong Hills centered on forbidding ritual Earth worship. Typical of British sentiment that fetishism prevented the advancement of native society, Armitage ordered the military to again take action into the Sapari Hills. Accompanied by the Provincial and District commissioners, Armitage and a contingent of the Gold Coast Regiment marched into Zouaragu and destroyed the shrine and further convinced the tindana that the British intended to remain in the area.<sup>256</sup>

### Young and Old

The northern administration interpreted the divergent reactions they saw between young and old Africans as evidence that colonial rule was civilizing non-chiefly society. The observation revealed an interesting contradiction because indirect rule intended to enshrine the older, traditional parts of native society. Following this rationale, the

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<sup>254</sup> *ARNT, 1915*, 19.

<sup>255</sup> *ARNT, 1915*, 20.

<sup>256</sup> *ARNT, 1915*, 21.

administration should have expected the most cooperation with village elders, members of the community most in touch with local custom. As becomes clear below, the protectorate administration fought most with elders and least with village youth.

The annual reports indicated how the administration described the older generation as ongoing resisters that symbolized the essential infantilism of non-chiefly tribal society. Despite the generally self-congratulatory tone that emerged in 1920, the British highlighted the problems associated with the generational divide between progressive young Africans and the remnants of their disenchanting conservative elders.

Armitage was typically colorful in his reports. In 1916, he wrote that

the old men and heads of compounds still resent the restored authority of the Chiefs and are reactionary to a man...The authority of the Chiefs is openly flouted and the most trivial incident may arouse all the savagery lying dormant in the hitherto tractable aboriginal.<sup>257</sup>

A few years later Armitage continued to describe the problem of the rebelliousness and “fanatical hatred” among the old men of the northern provinces. “They do everything in their power to counteract the growing authority of the chiefs,” he fumed, “and put every obstacle in the way of their young men getting into touch with civilization.”<sup>258</sup> Again, in 1919: “They live in the past, oblivious of the miseries that they endured in their youth and before the advent of Whiteman.”<sup>259</sup> In the end, the administration interpreted local opposition as signs of the fundamental inferiority of a generation of Africans living without British and chiefly patronage.

Further disturbance in Zouaragu, according to Armitage, was the result of “old men” who disputed the authenticity of the local chiefs imposed by the British in recent years. According to Armitage, the elders had judged the cooperation of the younger

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<sup>257</sup> *ARNT 1916*, 18.

<sup>258</sup> *ARNT, 1918*, 18.

<sup>259</sup> *ARNT, 1919*, 18.

generation with the foreign imposed figurehead as a weakness of manhood. When the British left the District in 1915, the youth at the town of Lungu took up arms against neighboring Bongo to prove their vigor to the older generation. The violence escalated to the extent that the District Commissioner required reinforcements from the police force at Tamale. After two days of fighting, the British tried and executed six of the young leaders and imprisoned two others who later died in prison.<sup>260</sup>

The notion that the youth of the protectorate represented the superiority of chiefly communities was a key theme to the British leading into the years of the First World War. Local involvement during the war was so definitive to the administration that Cardinal exclaimed happily, “they have broken away from their traditions, their future looms bright, and in no long time they will neglect and forget [the] hampering fetters of age-old customs...”<sup>261</sup> Here, the traditional past of non-chiefly society appeared to Cardinal as an un-evolved darkness. He further reflected on what appeared as the positive impact that British policy had on the protectorate by arguing that supporting chieftaincy throughout the Northern Territories had illuminated the “darker side” of native society. As a sign of this dubious claim, Cardinal wondered, if the youth who lived in non-chiefly groups took the introduction of chieftaincy into their communities as a point of pride. To mark their gratitude, the younger generation proved their new superior status to their British commissioners by fighting in the colonial infantry against the German controlled forces in neighboring Togoland, Cameroon, and East Africa.<sup>262</sup>

Cardinal held the ability of military service to imbue superior moral attributes into eligible young African men from the non-chiefly sectors of the protectorate in high

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<sup>260</sup> *ARNT, 1915*, 18.

<sup>261</sup> Cardinal, xii.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

esteem. To his mind, mobilization of the Gold Coast Regiment during the First World War provided young Africans the “first opportunity” to express loyalty.<sup>263</sup> In addition to this unlikely boast, enlisting into the Gold Coast Regiment trained young Africans in British forms of personal discipline, military drill, and the general requirement to wear European clothing and maintain European standards of personal hygiene. So great was the response from the youth that Armitage indicated the majority of the new soldiers stationed in Ashanti Region regiments were actually migrants from the Northern Territories.<sup>264</sup> On the other hand, Armitage stated that the older generation had a different reaction to the British recruitment of soldiers from the Northern provinces. As the war drew to a close, he indicated that old men hurled “curses” and other threats against the “droves” of young recruits from the North-West Province who enlisted into the Gold Coast Regiment.<sup>265</sup>

### The Civilizing South

By the late 1920s, the perceived superiority of the Ashanti helped initiate a new direction in civilizing policy among British administrators. The British represented the growing southward migration of youth from the savannah as another opportunity to civilize individuals from non-chiefly communities of the Northern Territories. By 1922, the Annual Reports from the north reflected the British concern about the lack of economic growth in the region. Since the administration measured civilization especially by the appearance of profitable markets and its related infrastructure, slow economic growth had a negative effect on the colonial imagination of the Northern Territories; consequently, the British positioned the Northern Territories below the relative human development they saw in Ashanti and the Gold Coast Colony.

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>264</sup> *ARNT*, 1918, 18.

<sup>265</sup> *ARNT*, 1918, 18.

As in previous reports from the north, Chief Commissioner Louis Castellain thought that separating young men from their villages and exposing them to southern industries was essential to push aside the backwardness of their parents. He affirmed that by earning wages in southern mining and railway factories, youth from the protectorate would lose all contact with “the family fetish” and the daily routines of “their less civilized brothers.”<sup>266</sup> The civilizing effect became more complete when the young laborers returned to the north with large amounts of disposable income to spend in European styled markets.<sup>267</sup>

The annual reports confirmed that the Gold Coast Colony and Ashanti Region were more profitable British possessions than the Northern Territories. As early as 1908, Northern Territories Chief Commissioner Irvine noted increased import duties received at trading centers in the Gold Coast compared to goods from the north.<sup>268</sup> As the years progressed, southern industries increasingly drew youth from savannah neighborhoods. Chief Commissioner Robertson also indicated that a growing number of laborers from the north migrated to the colony in 1912.<sup>269</sup> On the surface, the need to develop motorways and transport along the Volta River increasingly reflected the British intention to connect northern labor and raw materials with southern industries. Commissioner Philbrick reported to the Colonial Office that the Gold Coast Governor had visited Tamale in 1920 to speak publicly to representatives of Gonja and Dagomba. The Governor’s speech emphasized the administration’s ongoing aim to develop commercial agriculture in the savannah and its associated infrastructure connecting north to south.<sup>270</sup> Along these

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<sup>266</sup> *ARNT*, 1923-24, 21.

<sup>267</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Vol, Of Revelation and Revolution, Vol., II*, 219.

<sup>268</sup> *ARNT*, 1908, 5.

<sup>269</sup> *ARNT*, 1913, 4.

<sup>270</sup> *ARNT*, 1920, 19; Michael Crowder and Obaro Ikime, xvii.

motorways and ports of the Volta River, the British could funnel labor southward and earn large tax revenue in southern destinations.

As a response, the Colonial Office focused the main wealth of the savannah—its cattle, agricultural goods, and workers—to underwrite industries in the Ashanti Region and Gold Coast. Chief Commissioner Philbrick reported to London that the Northern Territories still did not produce a profit or even cover its own administrative costs, especially since the abolition of the successful Caravan Tax in 1906.<sup>271</sup> The Northern Commissioner's office collected a paltry £1,388 through court fees, fines, licenses, and other fees to pay for the £13,800 in expenditures.<sup>272</sup> Despite this shortfall, he echoed the view of some previous administrations that the main purpose of the protectorate was to supply labour south to mining, agricultural, and infrastructure ventures and candidates to local police services and the West African Frontier Force.<sup>273</sup> Thus, after the initial stages of establishing and deepening British control over the savannah, it became increasingly clear that the northern staff began funneling the human resources of the north to the institutions and productions of southern regions. Underneath the surface of this trend lay the idea that the British could use the south to civilize the savannah.

Working towards systems of indirect rule soon produced difficulties in the Northern Territories, a protectorate inhabited mainly by hundreds of scattered, decentralized family compounds with only a few centralized communities. Despite the limited number of chiefs, the British responded to their problems by deepening their commitment to chieftaincy and their array of chiefly appointments in the non-chiefly communities. The British were content to see chieftaincy as a legacy of Islam, and so the

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<sup>271</sup> *ARNT*, 1922, 3.

<sup>272</sup> *ARNT*, 1922, 3.

<sup>273</sup> *ARNT*, 1922, 12.



administration continued viewing the most powerful chieftaincy in the area, the Ashanti, as the leading civilizing location.

## Chapter 4 - Anthropology

The collected writings of Gold Coast Anthropologist Ronald Sutherland Rattray provided academic credence to the ever-deepening belief in the superiority of chieftaincy in the British colonial imagination.<sup>274</sup> The British administration commissioned Rattray's studies as part of a project to create an anthropological map of the region to assist in the civilizing project.

The anthropology departments of British universities were influential research bodies aiding the work of colonizing elites.<sup>275</sup> The idealized image of the African chief illustrated how British scholars and administrators created mental images of the colonial subject. The "imagined community," Uma Kothari contended, powerfully influenced the decisions of the colonizers in how to design their regimes.<sup>276</sup> Rattray helped fortify the enduring confidence colonial administrators had in chiefly rulers in the Northern Territories by constructing an ideal anthropological image of chieftaincy in Ashanti.

By using previous years' data from the protectorate census office, Rattray confirmed Anderson's claim that British colonizers employed an "imagined map [to] organize the new educational, juridical, public-health, police, and immigration bureaucracies it was building on the basis of ethno-racial hierarchies."<sup>277</sup> In particular, the Colonial Office hoped to develop "chiefs" in West Africa to become the eventual "local

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<sup>274</sup> Ronald S. Rattray, *Ashanti* (Oxford: University Press, 1923); *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (London: University Press, 1927); *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, (Oxford: University Press, 1929); *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, Vol. I & II (Oxford: University Press, 1932).

<sup>275</sup> To illustrate the view of the day, read the brief discussion about the difference between anthropology for the "degree student" and the "probationer" entering colonial service. "Meyer Fortes, "Anthropological Training for Colonial Officials," *Man* Vol. 46 (Jul. - Aug. 1946), 94.

<sup>276</sup> Uma Kothari, "From colonial administration to development studies," pp. 47-66 in *A Radical History of Development Studies*, Uma Kothari ed., (St. Martin's Press, 2005), 51.

<sup>277</sup> Benedict Anderson, "Census, Map, Museum," 596.

self-government” of future statehood.<sup>278</sup> Thus, when Rattray arrived at Tamale in the late 1920s to research *Tribes of the Northern Territories*, his extensive work on Ashanti prepared him, and the northern administration, to recognize chiefly groups occupying the forefront of human progress.

Rattray suggested that chieftaincies in the northern territories were both linked to the legacy of Ashanti power and a result of the civilizing influence of Islam. In elaborating on the latter point, Rattray reiterated what was perhaps the most influential statement concerning the goals of British rule in West Africa, Lord Lugard’s 1922, *The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa*. In this work, Frederick Lugard, the governor-general of Nigeria, argued that centralized authority, urbanization, textile-production, literacy, and systems of taxation indicated a Muslim civilizing process in West Africa. Together, these arguments strengthened hostile British attitudes toward both the tindana and non-chiefly groups.

#### The Problem of Chiefs in Chiefless Society

Anthropology became a key tool for British colonizers to determine why indirect rule was causing severe problems in the protectorate. The British came to understand that the fabrication of chiefly rulers in non-chiefly areas increased regional conflicts for the administration of the protectorate. In this way, the near three decades of colonial rule through chiefs had created more disorder than its ultimate aim to foster civilized behavior. To the British, the key problem of Native Authorities, the array of government backed chiefly councils, in part lay with the poor quality of the existing chiefs. In a 1929 conference, the Chief and District Commissioners of the protectorate described their rule

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<sup>278</sup> Michael Crowder and Obaro Ikime, introduction to *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status Under Colonial Rule and Independence* Michael Crowder and Obaro Ikime eds., (Ife: University Press, 1979), xvii.

as “quasi indirect.” The administrative staff complained that too much in the protectorate still depended on their own actions and decisions, especially in legal disputes. They expressed hesitancy in expanding policies of indirect rule in the north due to “unreliable” and poorly educated chiefs, overall financial poverty, and a general lack of sustained initiative from Africans and British leaders alike to advance adequate taxation and infrastructure.<sup>279</sup> In turn, the administration realized that the general lack and low quality of local chiefs hindered the economic independence of the north.

In *Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, Rattray included the following excerpt from an unnamed administrative source that showed how indirect rule created internal discord in communities without traditions of centralized authority:

The people look with suspicion on any one who prospers and becomes the owner of property, or on any of their so-called ‘Chiefs,’ who, backed up by us, “put on airs,” and try to assume control over the people. The Chiefs have no prestige, no historical names to quote as their predecessors. This is as true to-day as it was twenty years ago.<sup>280</sup>

As this statement indicates, Rattray conveyed that British support of chiefly authority assigned unnatural wealth and prestige to persons without political status.<sup>281</sup> Writing in 1933, District Commissioner James Eyre-Smith also confirmed that the “European-made chiefs” often exploit their new position to extort wealth from their new underlings.<sup>282</sup> The quote also reveals the twenty years of frustration among administrators who long realized that the principles of indirect rule in decentralized communities had little “historical names” granting legitimacy to their British appointments.

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<sup>279</sup> Northern Territories commissioners conference, January 3, 1929, NRG 8/2/5, NAGT.

<sup>280</sup> Rattray, *Tribes*, 366.

<sup>281</sup> Instances of fraud among Government-made or appointed chiefs included the gathering of personal wealth for themselves, brothers, and heirs, acquiring fees and fines from disputes, receiving gifts of extortion from sub-chiefs, and accepting agricultural labour from sub-chiefs. See Rattray, *Tribes*, 488-89.

<sup>282</sup> James Eyre-Smith, *A Brief Review of the History and Social Organization of the Peoples of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast* (Accra: Government Printer, 1933), 39-40.

In 1932, British Anthropologist Meyer Fortes further noted how the questionable power of Mamprussi over the Tallensi problematized British rule in non-chiefly communities. Fortes also described how by 1934 Indirect Rule accumulated individual wealth for chiefs and headmen and caused conflicts and extortions in Tallensi.<sup>283</sup> Fortes was not an officer in the Colonial Service, but he was sympathetic to the prospect of British rule creating law and order and preserving native institutions in West Africa.<sup>284</sup> He published a highly specialized article on the Tallensi that corresponded with Rattray's research in the Northern Territories. It was no coincidence that Fortes chose the Tallensi, and not another decentralized society, or even a chiefly group important to the British Native Administration, such as the Dagomba or Gonja. Since 1901, the northern administration fought the Tallensi, a people of continual resistance. Like Rattray's general survey of the natives of the savannah, the British hoped Fortes' case study would provide scholarly insights for the administration's attempt to pacify the Tallensi and other districts like the supposedly mischievous savages from the Tong Hills. Fortes underscored the British assumption that the Tallensi chiefs (Namoos) were subservient to Kurugu Division of Mamprussi.<sup>285</sup>

The view confirmed the ongoing British belief that the Mamprussi were historical masters over many non-chiefly communities of the North West Province. Yet, as Fortes reported, British attempts to consolidate the authority of the Mamprussi chiefs over the Tallensi had been largely ineffective.<sup>286</sup> Rattray also outlined how moves by ambitious clansmen hoping to increase their material standing hurt British rule. The chief of Namnam complained how, people who knew "nothing about Chieftainship," and false-

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<sup>283</sup> Fortes, "The Political System of the Tallensi of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast", 251.

<sup>284</sup> Fortes, 240, 257.

<sup>285</sup> Fortes, 256.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 257.

chiefs gained material support from British. For example, hopeful individuals in Namnam aspired to the office of Kambonaba, or chief of the rifle company, simply to gain prestige from the British officers.<sup>287</sup>

#### Inventing the “particular genius” of Chieftaincy in West Africa

Despite these criticisms, the British never gave up their attachment to the idea of installing chiefs and Rattray did much to guide this endeavor. Examining his investigations into Ashanti and its northern tribes revealed a lengthy textual contribution to the British imagination of the superiority of chiefly rule in the Northern Territories.

In 1921, Chief Commissioner of the Ashanti Region, C.H. Harper, enthusiastically anticipated Rattray’s forthcoming research on Ashanti “Laws and Customs.” In his yearly report to the Colonial Office, Commissioner Harper contemplated the relationship between the emergent field of anthropology and more than twenty years of “overwhelming” British intervention in Ashanti. He believed anthropologists must recognize some aspects of “native religion and culture” as worthy ingredients to the British modernizing project in West Africa:

Face to face with a material progress and civilization which seems overwhelming and all devouring there must be a strong temptation for the young Ashanti to cut himself adrift from his past and to become dependent for all moral as well as all material needs upon the European. But Anthropological research will show that there is much in native religion and custom which is worth a secure place in modern progress and which will tend to preserve the genius of the people.<sup>288</sup>

On one hand, the British believed they were agents of change, but needed to determine what features of native life could contribute to the new age they were building. As this thesis argues, until the late 1920s, the British largely relied upon the writing of travel

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<sup>287</sup> Rattray, *Tribes*, 259-60, 369.

<sup>288</sup> *AR – Ashanti*, 1921, 17.

adventurers, political agents, and the informal ethnographies of their administrative staff to learn how to govern the native in West Africa. With the growing interest in racial understandings of humans, the Colonial Office turned to anthropology as a new source of formal knowledge.

Rattray's work on the Gold Coast represented a major intellectual contribution helping the British envision and construct modernity in West Africa. This undertaking, added Rattray, was to help the brightest Africans take

their place in the commonwealth of nations, not as denationalized Ashanti, but as African People who will become the greater force and power in the Empire because they have not bartered the wealth of their past, metaphorically and not infrequently in reality, for a coat, a collar, or a tie.<sup>289</sup>

Rattray added to the superior image of chieftaincy by discussing Ashanti chiefly organization as a national framework. Rattray argued that British policy should preserve Ashanti chieftaincies as a foundation to build European national systems in West Africa.<sup>290</sup> During his years studying Kumasi and its environs, Rattray believed that the elite classes of Ashanti would “leave landmarks which the particular genius of that people will always recognize, and it will help them along the road of progress however difficult it may be.”<sup>291</sup> In this way, the chiefly court of the Asante nation epitomized for Rattray the heights of achievement in black West Africa. He conceded, however, the lasting contradiction in using tradition as a vehicle to create modernity, the very anti-thesis to tradition and other obstacles to progress:

we would therefore appear to be encouraging on one hand an institution which draws its inspiration and validity from the indigenous religious beliefs, while on the other we are

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<sup>289</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti*, 12.

<sup>290</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, ix.

<sup>291</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti*, 13.

systematically destroying the very foundation upon which the structure that we are striving to perpetuate stands.<sup>292</sup>

The more the administration took seriously the native institutions of the protectorate, as they increasingly did during the 1920s, the more the British faced the extent to which they intended chieftaincies to control the levers of future political power.<sup>293</sup>

In part, then, Rattray reaffirmed the perceived superiority of chiefly groups in the Northern Territories after associating savannah chieftaincies with the Ashanti chieftaincy. He noted a number of apparent similarities between the Akan-speaking ruling class of the Asante Confederacy and the chiefly families belonging to the Mamprussi, Dagomba, Gonja, Nanumba, Moshi, and Wa.<sup>294</sup> Rattray based this hypothesis in part on his analysis of the 1921 census, which revealed that the languages of eighty percent of the northern population derived from one common linguistic base.<sup>295</sup> Rattray is responsible for dividing the language of the Northern Territories into its current three semi-distinct groups, and from these categories he found numerous linguistic similarities to Akan words.<sup>296</sup>

The apparent likeness between Ashanti and the political organization and language of Gonja helped Rattray construct an image of the historical importance of northern chieftaincies. To Rattray, the people of Gonja had many idiomatic affinities with the Ashanti, including the use of words for “earth,” “sun,” “sky-god,” “oath,” “spirit of the dead,” and “landowner.”<sup>297</sup> He also reported that the royal court of Gonja situated around the townships of Yendi and Naleregu mirrored the Asante alliance of chieftaincies

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<sup>292</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, ix.

<sup>293</sup> Kimble, 485-490.

<sup>294</sup> Rattray, *Tribes*, xxi, 344.

<sup>295</sup> That is, Dagomba, Mamprussi, Nanumba, Kusasi, Nabdam, Talansi, Nankanni, Builsa, Dagati, Wala, Lobi. Rattray, *Tribes*, viii.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, *Tribes*, ix.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, *Tribes*, 43.



existing in and around Kumasi.<sup>298</sup> While he admitted his want of a deeper analysis of Gonja compared to the attention he gave towards the Dagomba and Mamprussi Constitutions, later anthropological studies by Madeline Manoukian in 1951 carried on Rattray's initial theorizing about the similarities in the political structure of Gonja and the Asante Confederation.<sup>299</sup> The Gonja "state," claimed Manoukian, resembled the Asante system of federalization by consisting of seven sub-divisions under a Paramount Chief (Ya-bumwura) located at a capital region (Damongo). In another instance duplicating the Asante political constitution, Manoukian described head-chiefs throughout Gonja districts serving constituents with aid from a council of Elders—which included Muslim clerics—and various sub-heads who directed groups of villages in the area of his ancestry.<sup>300</sup> Thus, the notion of northern chieftaincies somehow connected to Ashanti continued to captivate scholars into a second generation of anthropology centered on the Northern Territories.

The comparisons between the successful alliance systems in the north and the Asante Confederacy underscored the British confidence that chiefly groups in the Northern Territories were progressive communities. For instance, Rattray argued that decentralized, federal systems of politics were important explanations for the enduring political successes of the Mamprussi, Dagomba, Moshi, and Ashanti.<sup>301</sup> In contrast, attempts at autocratic expansion failed to sustain unity.<sup>302</sup> In this way, Rattray emphasized that invading groups did not have a lasting impact on empire building compared to the

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<sup>298</sup> Rattray, *Tribes*, xix.

<sup>299</sup> Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 127.

<sup>300</sup> Manoukian, 63.

<sup>301</sup> Rattray, *Tribes*, 550.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, *Tribes*, 549.

Asante or other examples of federalized forms of politics along the Volta basin.<sup>303</sup> In turn, understanding the success of collaborative approaches to political rule in the savannah encouraged the British belief that policies of indirect rule could secure many tribes under one native administration.

Rattray also discussed comparisons between the Dagomba, Mamprussi, and Ashanti constitutions to confirm the superiority of chieftaincies to the administration in the Northern Territories. Rattray saw the following hierarchies connecting the Mamprussi Paramount Chief and his three divisional armies mirroring the Asante national military configuration. Through the divisions, a number of townships were subservient to the Mamprussi Paramount Chief, who had ultimate control over the three divisional armies protecting their local townships.<sup>304</sup> Furthermore, the three divisional chiefs paid the Mamprussi Na tribute. Rattray also saw similarities between the Dagomba Constitution and the Asante Confederacy. He indicated that each division commanded a Left, Right, and Center Wing of the federal army. The Paramount Chief of Dagomba in Yendi occupied the Rear Guard and received protection of the Zonbareba, an elite royal guard, and from an accompanying rifle division, the Kyido.<sup>305</sup> Here, another etymological similarity became more evident to Rattray, where he stressed how *Sapa-sene* in Mamprussi/Dagomba approximated the Akan word for Division-Head, *Safo-hene*.<sup>306</sup>

#### Imagining a Muslim Past

Rattray wrote about the Islamic roots to chieftaincy in the Northern Territories to reflect the pervasive Lugardian belief that settler Islamic society elevated the human status of some otherwise backwards West African communities. The pervasive use of the

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<sup>303</sup> Rattray, *Tribes*, 549.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., *Tribes*, 555.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., *Tribes*, 569.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., *Tribes*, 555-56.

Islamic religion into the 1930s deepened Said's contention about how British colonialism conceived Islam as "essentially a political instrument, not by any means a spiritual one."<sup>307</sup>

Lugard did as much to create the perceived superiority of Muslim society for other British administrators in West Africa. Lugard represented the Muslim foreigners as producers of complex and advanced cultural institutions. Similarly, he commended the appearance of taxation regimes, courts of justice, textile production, urbanization, and the advancement of agriculture as an Islamic civilizing force: "the alien immigrants in the northern tropical belt afford better material for social organization, both racially and through the influence of their creed."<sup>308</sup> Moreover, Lugard deemed the influx of Islamic society in West Africa as a step towards human progress suiting the polygamy and slavery practices of African communities.<sup>309</sup>

British colonizers working in the West African savannah commonly recognized Islam as a more effective civilizing agent than Christianity. The reigning belief was that systematic Christian theology was above the simple mind of the African. Whereas, British officials believed that, Islam only required adherents to embrace monotheism and Mohammed as a messenger of God.<sup>310</sup> Islam, as it appeared to Lugard, was an ideal religious practice that could reduce black superstitions, increase personal self-control, and help centralize political rule around chieftaincy.<sup>311</sup> The image of a dominating, superior Arab society arriving in the savannah with civilization in hand was a powerful encouragement about the essential connection between chieftaincies and Lugard's

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<sup>307</sup> Said, 151.

<sup>308</sup> Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1965), 79, 204.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>310</sup> Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, 356-358.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 78.

espoused Emirates in Northern Nigeria. As a result, the view emboldened the administration's optimism that chiefly groups were superior human communities.

The British recognized similar ancestries between Nigerian emirates and chieftaincies in the Northern Territories indicating common human progress in West Africa. For instance, Lugard saw the introduction of "Aryan or Hamitic blood" elevating the primitive tribal culture of black West Africa.<sup>312</sup> He argued that the Muslim forefathers of Hausaland, Bornu, and Yoruba in Northern Nigeria shared European cultural achievement of the thirteenth century.<sup>313</sup>

Highlighting the Islamic origins to chiefly rule was a significant way that Rattray signaled to the administration that indirect rule was as suitable for Chiefs in the Northern Territories as it was with Emirs in Nigeria. In reading *The Dual Mandate* as an unofficial textbook for colonial rule in West Africa, the administration in the Northern Territories had many reasons to recognize chieftaincy as a cultural artifact produced by a superior immigrant group to West Africa. Relying on this interpretation, the officers were inclined to recognize the superiority of distant ethnicities represented among the natives. "Chief among them," commented District Commissioner James Eyre-Smith, "being Berber, Semitic, Arab, Egyptian, so that we are not dealing with a homogenous race of negros in any part of the Gold Coast."<sup>314</sup> Eyre-Smith postulated that these outsiders were "from a more highly developed state, and bringing with them superior knowledge, were able to become the ruling classes among the conquered peoples."<sup>315</sup> His comments mirrored the persistent view of the administration in around 1933 that the settlement of Arab or Muslim travelers elevated black West Africa.

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<sup>312</sup> Lugard, 76; Curtin, 4, 11.

<sup>313</sup> Lugard, 76.

<sup>314</sup> Eyre-Smith. 14.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 29.

In the Northern Territories, Rattray postulated that the Mamprussi chieftaincy originated from the Sokoto Caliphate, a pre-colonial Muslim state with links to Hausa. From his informants, Rattray described four descendants from the first Mamprussi Paramount Chief, Bawa, who migrated west from his Sokoto homeland. Eventually, successors to the Mamprussi royal line moved to various townships located in the Northern Territories.<sup>316</sup> From these new locations, the Muslim chiefs intermarried with the local inhabitants and established the Wala, Dagomba, Moshi, Nanumba, and Gonja states. Recognizing this progressive racial tie to Northern Nigeria, the British eventually built these groups into major Native Administrations.<sup>317</sup> Rattray's description of the ascendant Muslim ancestry to the chiefly groups in the Northern Territories reflected the longstanding British optimism with the Mamprussi, Dagomba, and Gonja as historically strong Muslim "successors" capable of supporting the northern colonial bureaucracy.<sup>318</sup>

The absence of existing emirates in the Northern Territories did not diminish the superior image of chieftaincy in Rattray's writing. After all, Rattray held to Lugard's main presupposition that chiefly authority, not necessarily Islamic faith and practice, indicated human progress.<sup>319</sup> Rattray saw Muslim newcomers bringing a new "barbaric state" to the savannah and allowed the tenants of Islam to integrate with the local spiritualist practices.<sup>320</sup> Notice from his comment that the Africans with Islamic history remained "barbaric," signaling the lowly condition of all Africans in the British mind. The foreigners, he elaborated, for the most part adopted the language and ethnic identities

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<sup>316</sup> See map, "Trade, settlements, and the diffusion of Islam in West Africa, 1500-1900," Appendix 5.

<sup>317</sup> Rattray, *Tribes*, 552.

<sup>318</sup> Michael Crowder and Obaro Ikime, 329.

<sup>319</sup> Lugard, 69.

<sup>320</sup> Rattray, *Tribes*, xv.

of the communities they encountered instead of expanding monotheist religion.<sup>321</sup> The quasi-Islamic faith of northern chiefs was the outcome of the spiritual beliefs of migrants east of the Volta River, in Nigeria. According to Rattray, the Hausa “aliens, i.e. settlers from Northern Nigeria,” were a minority society compared to the “pagans” that occupied the backward provinces of the protectorate.<sup>322</sup> The annual reports during the 1920s also reiterated this perception of religious practice in the north. British surveys of the protectorate echoed the limited, yet still evident, extent “Mohamedans” had in established themselves among “Pagan” and “Christian” followers in the Northern Territories.<sup>323</sup> According to his 1922-23 Annual Report, Chief Commissioner Castellain indicated that a diluted form of Islam in the Northern Territories remained in the few market districts of with Hausa ancestry, such as in Wa and Salaga.<sup>324</sup> By 1926, Leigh recounted the “sprinkling of Mohammedans,” but pointed out the Muslim presence in Wa and Salaga had “been for generations living in those towns.”<sup>325</sup>

Rattray fueled the British enthusiasm to see non-chiefly areas of the protectorate as weak subjects to chiefly groups of Muslim heritage. In doing so, Rattray confirmed the underlying belief held by twentieth century British imperialists like Lugard about the function Islam played in promoting human progress in West Africa: “Tribalism had over the centuries been sublimated by Islam.”<sup>326</sup> Rattray explained that the ancestral Mamprussi were Islamic “wandering soldiers of fortune” that introduced secular political authority opposing the older spiritualist-cults of the tindana.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid., *Tribes*, xiii, 550.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., *Tribes*, x.

<sup>323</sup> *AR– NT*, 1915, 18.

<sup>324</sup> *AR– NT*, 1924-25, 13.

<sup>325</sup> *AR– NT*, 1925-26, 13.

<sup>326</sup> Lugard, xl.

<sup>327</sup> Rattray, *Tribes*, xiv, 546.

Rattray listened to common narratives from elders, headmen, and chiefs about the ebbing place of tindanas in the local memory of the Northern Territories following the Muslim immigration. According to the numerous accounts of elders and chiefs at the Mamprussi capital region of Naleregu, Rattray indicated that the Muslim forbearers of Mamprussi settled in their present locations and collaborated with resident tindanas for clan authority over land, material possessions, and people.<sup>328</sup> While he pointed out an exceptional case where the invading Mamprussi chief, Na Nyagesa, executed scores of tindana before settling in Eastern Dagomba, the occupying chiefs largely came to rule in a peaceful conjunction with the resident spiritual leaders “in a kind of dual mandate.”<sup>329</sup> Fortes also recognized the influence of Muslim chiefs in reestablishing a new system of secular land ownership. Notably, he relayed a Tallensi clan myth that detailed the overwhelming affect the “red turban, the flowing gown, the horse and the gun”<sup>330</sup> of the invading Muslim chief Mosuor had on the tindanas of the Tong hills, who tendered his ancestor’s land in exchange for lasting peace. Similar to Fortes, Rattray continued the administration’s view that past Islamic agents challenged the traditional socio-political structure of the Northern Territories before British rule.

The belief that non-chiefly groups were historically subservient to chiefly rulers of Islamic descent further reinforced the belief in the superiority of chieftaincy in the Northern Territories. Another interesting illustration to Rattray about the historical power of Muslim chiefs over non-chiefly groups in the Northern Territories lay with his description of the Nankanse. According to Rattray, the Nankanse preferred their older name of “Grunshi,” a word meaning “Unbeliever,” “Kaffir,” or “eater of dogs” that

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., *Tribes*, 458, 464.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., *Tribes*, xv.

<sup>330</sup> Fortes, 246.

illustrated Muslim ascendancy in the local history.<sup>331</sup> Rattray's informants illustrated how Muslim and British arrival to the savannah slowly corroded the importance of tindanas from village life. After the arrival of the British, the enduring significance of tindanas in matters of land ownership, imposition of fines and matters of justice, and ceremonial sacrifices all but completely disappeared.<sup>332</sup>

The endorsement from an Oxford scholar like Rattray of a supposed social hierarchy in the savannah held powerful implications for the Colonial Office's intention for West Africa. The influence of scientific racism asserted that "regions of the earth designated as uncivilized ... ought to be annexed or occupied by advance powers."<sup>333</sup> In creating or relating the military supremacy of chiefly groups over non-chiefly societies, Rattray helped the London office justify the use of force in many of the decentralized regions of the protectorate. The superior image of chieftaincy reinforced negative views among the administration for pagan non-chiefly areas. The British continually worried that, unless checked, the tindana would frustrate colonial control over land. Again, the northern administration required strong chiefs to keep the balance of power in favor of the British. By not strengthening chiefly rule in West Africa, Lugard argued that administrators would have to continually confront primitive landlords like the tindana.<sup>334</sup> Similarly, the administration in the Northern Territories remained diligent in monitoring the vitality of tindanas in outlying districts. For instance, earth-priests in the protectorate resurfaced in a 1924 report by Chief Commissioner Louis Castellain. The Chief Commissioner reported that an earth-shrine appeared in the Tong Hills near the

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<sup>331</sup> Rattray, *Tribes*, 232.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., *Tribes*, 258, 260.

<sup>333</sup> Said, 207, 232, 233.

<sup>334</sup> Lugard, 78.



previously outlawed shrine the British military first destroyed in 1911.<sup>335</sup> In response to this, and other shows of cultural degradation, the British frequently employed the military.

The British continued to use their decades old “sanction of force” to create law and order in backwards non-chiefly areas of the Northern Territories.<sup>336</sup> Louis Castellain reported that the Northern Territories Constabulary was key to ending recurring inter-tribal conflicts among the “primitive people” of Konkomba in the Eastern Dagomba District at Sambul. After a few days, the police illustrated to the Konkomba the force of the British over the village by destroying 4000 poisoned arrows.<sup>337</sup> Armed conflict between the Konkomba and the Lawalugu indicated to the British that that the civilizing mission to “primitive people” of the protectorate remained unfinished: “any small dispute such as the possession of a fish or guinea fowl, will often lead to bloodshed among these primitive people.”<sup>338</sup>

The British maintained their belief in non-chiefly communities as infantile districts dependent on ongoing administrative presence. Developing quality infrastructure in the north also remained central to the commissioners’ ability to frequent the rest houses in each district. Chief Commissioner Leigh reiterated to London that instilling confidence in the local chiefs hinged on British officers remaining in each district.<sup>339</sup> In 1923, Louis Castellain happily reported to London that a completed motorway connected the “more wilder districts” of Zuaragu, Yeji, Tumu-Lawra, Bamboi, and Navrongo to chiefly led areas more central to the administration in Salaga, Tamale, Walewale, Wa,

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<sup>335</sup> *AR– NT, 1924-25*, 17.

<sup>336</sup> Fortes, 257.

<sup>337</sup> *ARNT, 1923-24*, 16.

<sup>338</sup> *ARNT, 1924-25*, 17.

<sup>339</sup> *ARNT, 1922-23*, 26.

and Bole.<sup>340</sup> The Colonial Office might have had some reason to think the strategy of regular administrative visits was having a positive effect on the civility of non-chiefly districts. The chronic difficulty the administration experienced in Lobi District seemed to dissipate in the early-1920s. Castellain optimistically quoted from the yearly report produced by the Lawra District Commissioner that positively demonstrated the pacification in “Lobi” and “Lobi-Dagarti” Districts of the Northern Province. The many British subjects there were a “sedate crowd, 75 per cent at least being clothed, many of them in European clothes, all wearing some kind of headgear, who [met] the Commissioner a few hundred yards from the Rest House.”<sup>341</sup> In 1924, Castellain again noted the apparent peace of the northern frontiers of the protectorate and that many individuals wore European clothing, a key sign of civilization.<sup>342</sup> He was particularly astonished by such progress in non-chiefly areas that normally required at least a minimal British presence.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> *ARNT, 1924-25*, 15.

<sup>341</sup> *ARNT, 1923-24*, 21.

<sup>342</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Vol. II*, 220.

<sup>343</sup> *ARNT, 1924-25*, 18.

## Chapter 5 – Conclusion

“The traits ascribed to the colonized are incompatible with one another, though this does not bother his prosecutor.”<sup>344</sup>

Albert Memmi

A study of the establishment of colonial rule in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast Colony clearly revealed the British perception that chieftaincy indicated human progress. The British had more than simple economic motivations for pushing north into the Gold Coast hinterland during the partition of Africa. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Colonial Office pursued a civilizing mission that relied upon an imagined continuum of human progress. In particular, British officials and scholars ranked the few ancestrally Islamic chieftaincies of the savannah above their more numerous non-chiefly neighbors. The relative inferiority of non-chiefly groups compared to the superiority of chieftaincies was a prominent discourse in the British colonial memory. This binary image of the savannah was part of a wider Orientalist literary tradition that functioned in the construction of the modern British self-image. The British continually needed to reinforce the negative perception of Africans to simultaneously create the image of the British Empire as a guardian of human civilization. Examining how the British used the history of Islamic West Africa to prove the inferiority of pure African society furthers that view.

The British typically overdrew Islam on the socio-political cartography of the Western Sudan. British emissaries, like Dupuis, Bowdich, Barth, and Park, who only visited the periphery of the region, constructed vivid images of a Muslim Empire operating the levers of central power in the savannah. They assumed that the more familiar Emirs in northern Africa and in Nigeria had similar representatives in trade and

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<sup>344</sup> Memmi, 688.

politics between Timbuktu and Kumasi. Near the end of the nineteenth century, the Colonial Office came to trust this myth of the interior and subsequently targeted the Dagomba, Gonja, and Mossi in treaty arrangements intending to persuade the Germans and French that England had legal relationships with the native authorities of the area.

The British perception of Islam had a lasting influence on the colonial imagination of the savannah. Interestingly, while the British Empire fought the savage revolts of Jihadists in Tanzania and feared the warlord Samory operating out of Cote D'Ivoire, they paradoxically praised the civilizing nature of Islam in the hinterlands of the Gold Coast. In the Nigerian administration, Lugard wrote lengthy dissertations on the superiority of Muslim culture compared to the scattered, simple, tribal villages of West Africa. Senior British administrators and anthropologists working in the savannah, like Lugard, Northcott, Rattray, and others, recognized trade, law, literacy, improved housing, clothing, medical care, and horse keeping, as examples of a Muslim civilizing effect. Furthermore, the mere Muslim ancestry to Dagomba and other chieftaincies were enough to convince the Colonial Office that chieftaincies were suited to represent British interests.

The British principle of indirect rule was a thin disguise to the application of direct force over the protectorate. While indirect rule depended on and supposedly preserved local traditional authorities, the British still exerted military and legal power when Africans did not comply with the colonial government. British administrators unhesitatingly fined and imprisoned all unwilling and outspoken members of the savannah. The arrests and detentions seemed more predictable in non-chiefly, or rebellious, regions but were also an intrusive activity in chiefly zones. The close relationship between district commissioners and chiefs, meant to license British

exploitation of local custom, ensured that chiefs and other African figures had no real option but to assent to the wants of the administration. The British believed their presence in the protectorate was unavoidable and absolutely necessary because African leaders, after all, were incapable of civilized decision-making. In this way, the application of colonial power had little difference in chiefly and non-chiefly communities, despite contesting the supposedly evolved political structures of chieftaincies. In decentralized areas, the British removed the bonds of kinship and ritual among tindanas and other village headmen by instituting “Government-made” chiefly authorities. When direct resistance, however localized, prohibited the British safe entry and threatened caravan routes, the colonizers escalated their response through direct military action. Thus, in both chiefly and non-chiefly groups, the local administration dispossessed Africans by subjecting them to an indifferent and militarily forceful colonial regime.

The British recognized the slave raiding of chiefly groups as a form of military superiority but intended law and order policies in the protectorate to end local kidnappings. For instance, the historical practice of slave raiding among the Dagomba created worry among the British administration that military leaders in Dagbon might continue to threaten the mandate of local security throughout the protectorate. The administration intended law and order ordinances to create a kind of civilized behavior that mirrored similar goals in British cities. Thus, caravan raids, murders, and kidnappings in the protectorate did not just disrupt the economy and general peace of the countryside, but the British also framed these behaviors as uncivilized signs of past inhumanities of the Muslim warlord Samory. The contradiction remained clear that while the British considered slavery an aberration of human nature, the slaving actions of

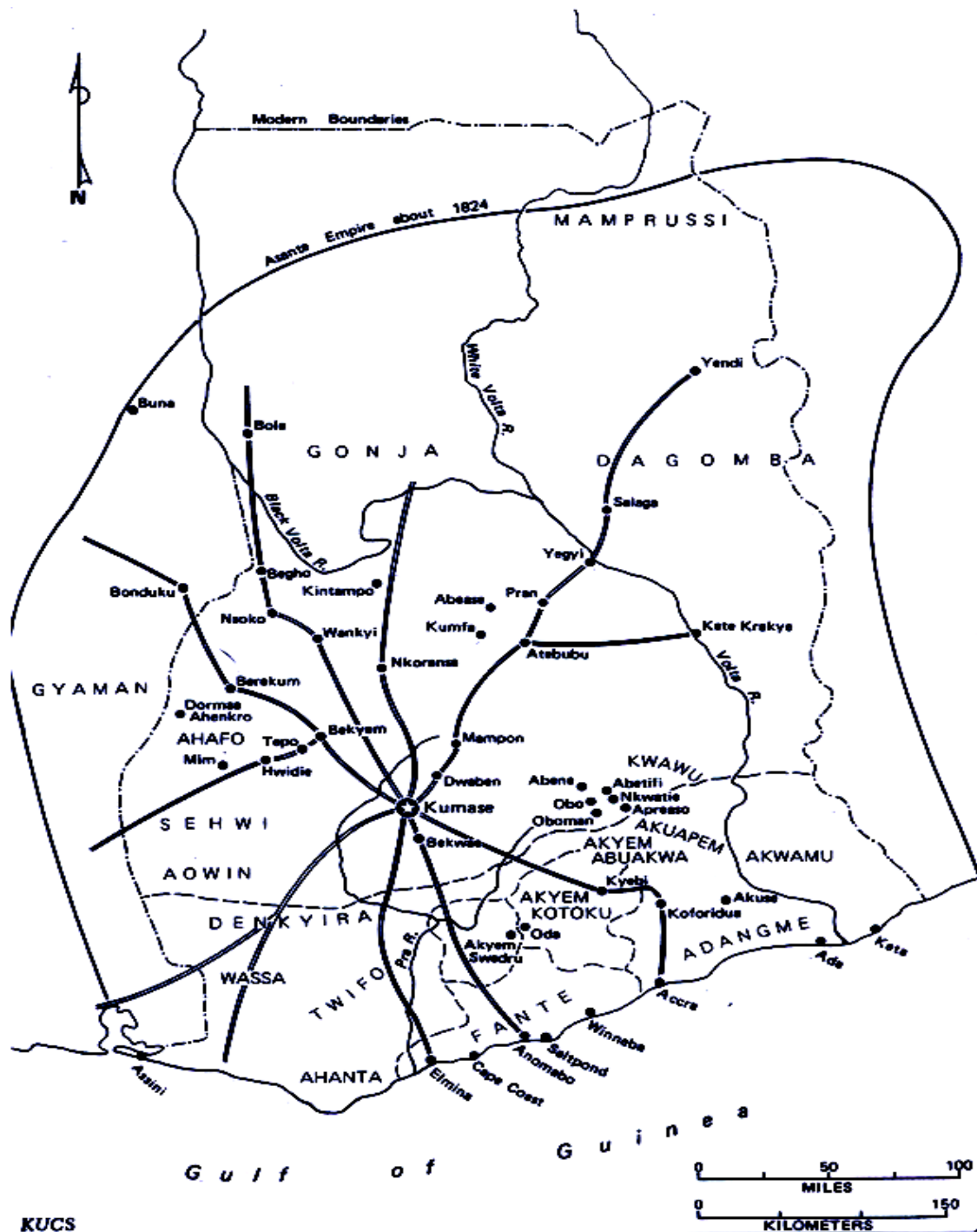
Dagomba and Samory nevertheless helped foster the superior image of chiefs and chiefly rule in the Northern Territories.

By supporting traditional authorities colonial masters ironically experienced resistance from an older generation of Africans living in the protectorate. Had the British been truly supporting traditional authority, they might have expected greater opposition from the young, left out of such an arrangement. Conversely, Africans more in touch with the traditions of the village might have appeared more compliant with the British outsiders. Yet, the annual reports illustrated the opposite trend. The documents often commented on how the young more readily accepted colonial institutions, while an older generation continually opposed colonial rule. The administration routinely portrayed insubordinate African parents and grandparents as symbols or links to the superstition and savagery of life before protectorate rule.

British colonial discourse relied on Europe and Africa remaining at different stages of human progress and yet the intention of colonialism in the protectorate was to develop a modern society. In the Northern Territories, chieftaincies like Dagomba and Gonja were superior because of their ancestral differences to mainstream savannah society. The British needed this image of the fundamental superiority of chieftaincies to justify their plans for the material and human development of the savannah. Yet, the wider motivation underpinning colonialism was the continual differentiation of Europe as progress and Africa as stagnancy. During the civilizing mission, both views of Africans—the positive image of chieftaincies that supported the tactics of indirect rule and the negative image of all Africans that supported the strategy of colonialism—could not last at the other's expense for very long.

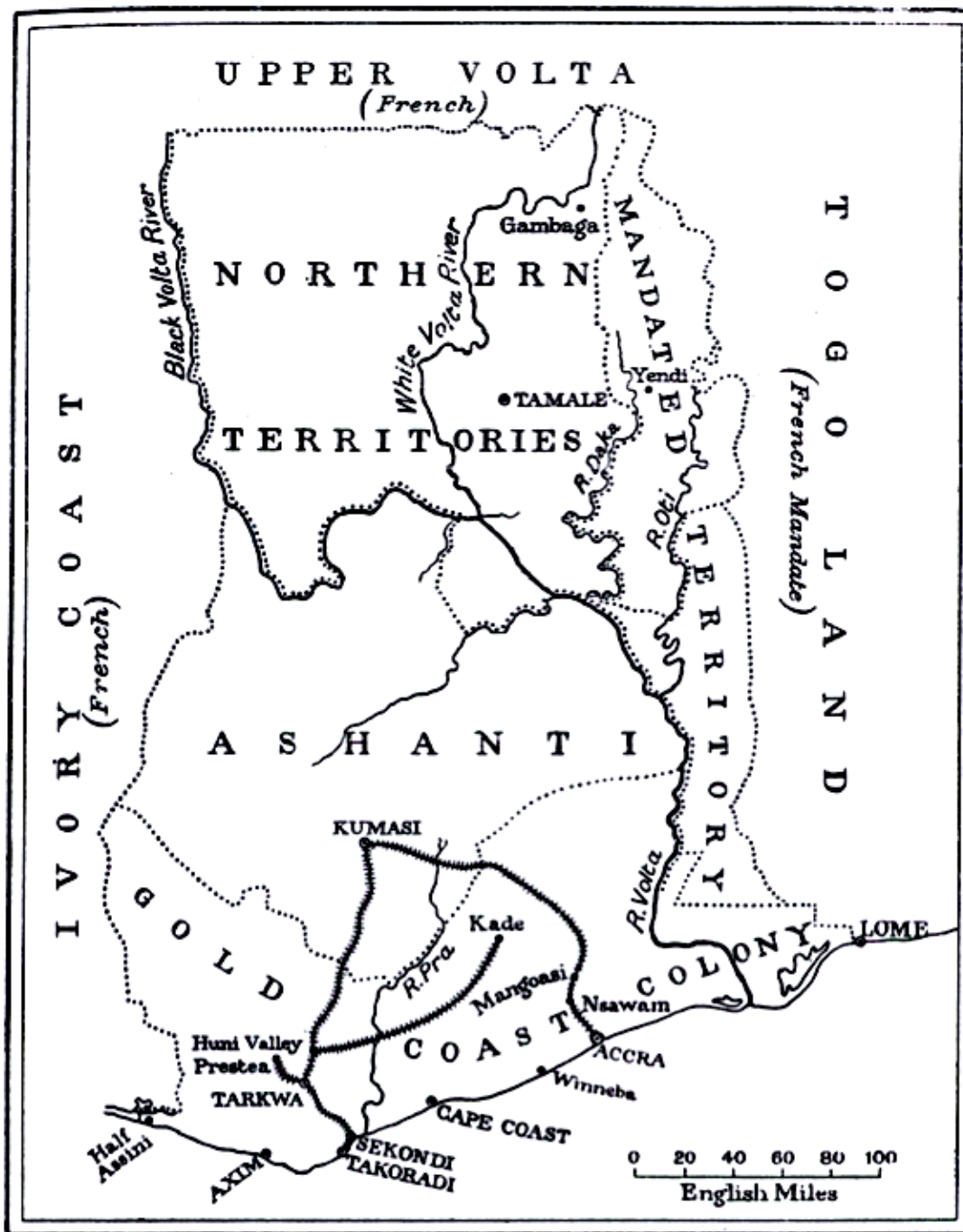
Chronic resistance in non-chiefly societies prevented effective governance. Administrators reported compliance to their rule mainly in traditional chiefly zones, but the array of Government-made chiefs created discord throughout the savannah. In response, the colonial government increased its research into African life hoping to sharpen its implementation of indirect rule, understanding, as Foucault has made clear, that knowledge is power. The rise of a generation of false-chiefs, or what Mammdani titled “decentralized despotists,” was a feature of all districts and undermined the effectiveness of British rule in the protectorate. Beyond this, the annual reports revealed that the general lack of chieftaincy compared to Ashanti and the Gold Coast hurt the British effort to maintain total control through Native Authorities. The lack of chiefly leadership, especially compared to the southern regions of the protectorate, reinforced the British perception that the savannah was barren of progress. Coincident to this view, the relative minority of chiefly groups weakened the British expectation that the Northern Territories would become an economically profitable beacon of human progress in West Africa.

## Appendix

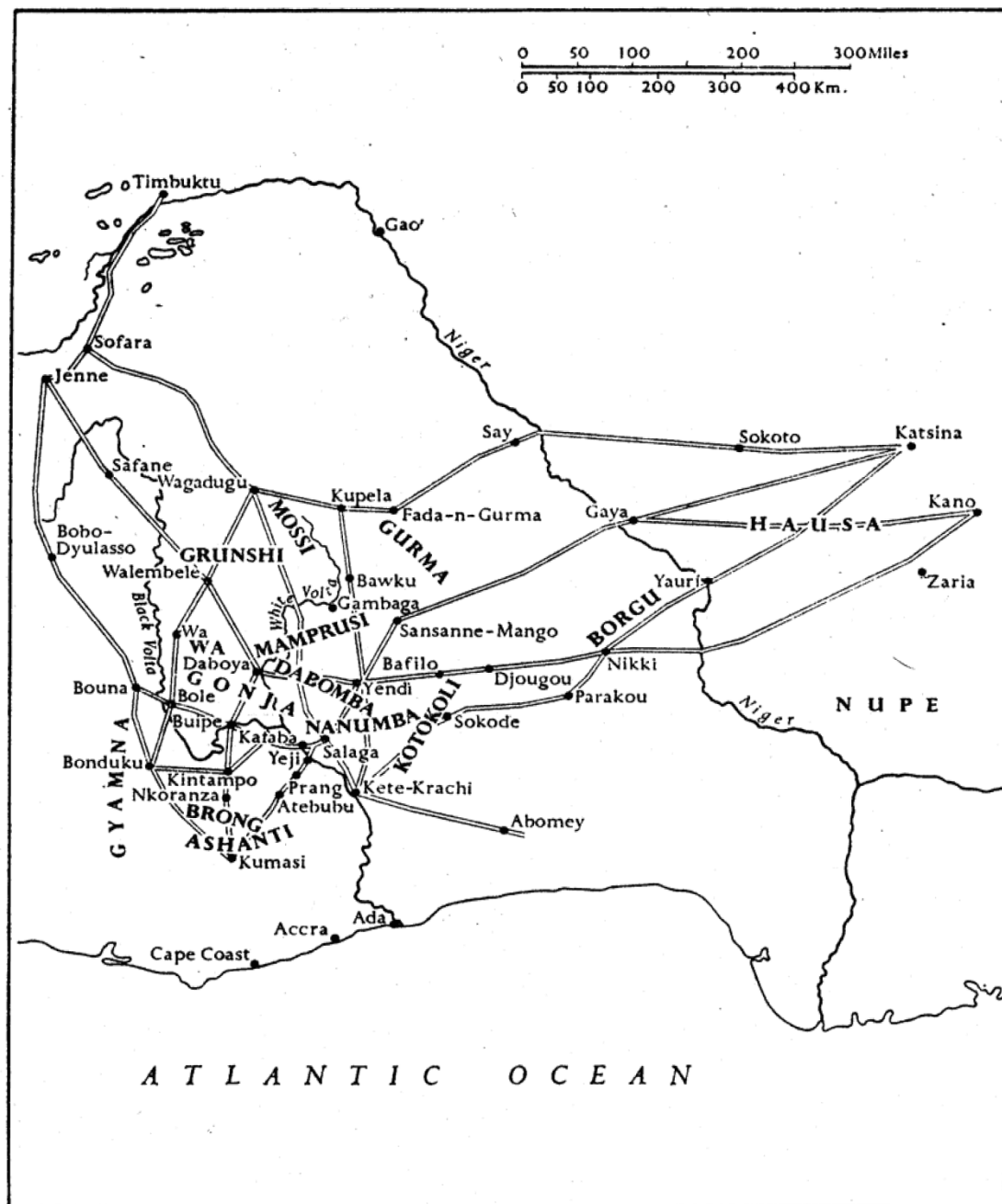


- KUCS**
1. Thomas J. Lewin, *Asante before the British: The Prempean Years, 1875-1900*. (Lawrence, KA: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 13. "The Asante Empire in the Early Nineteenth Century."

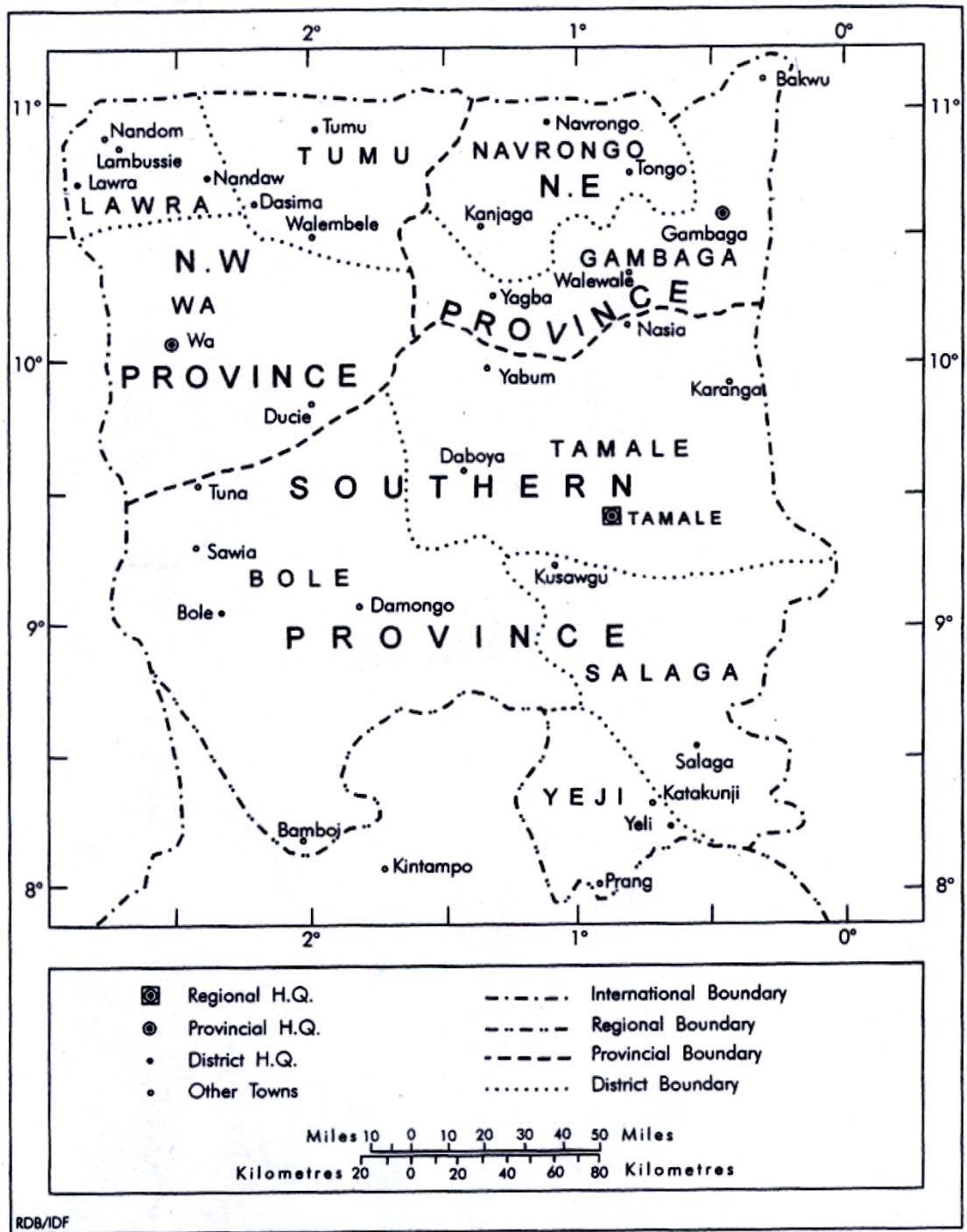




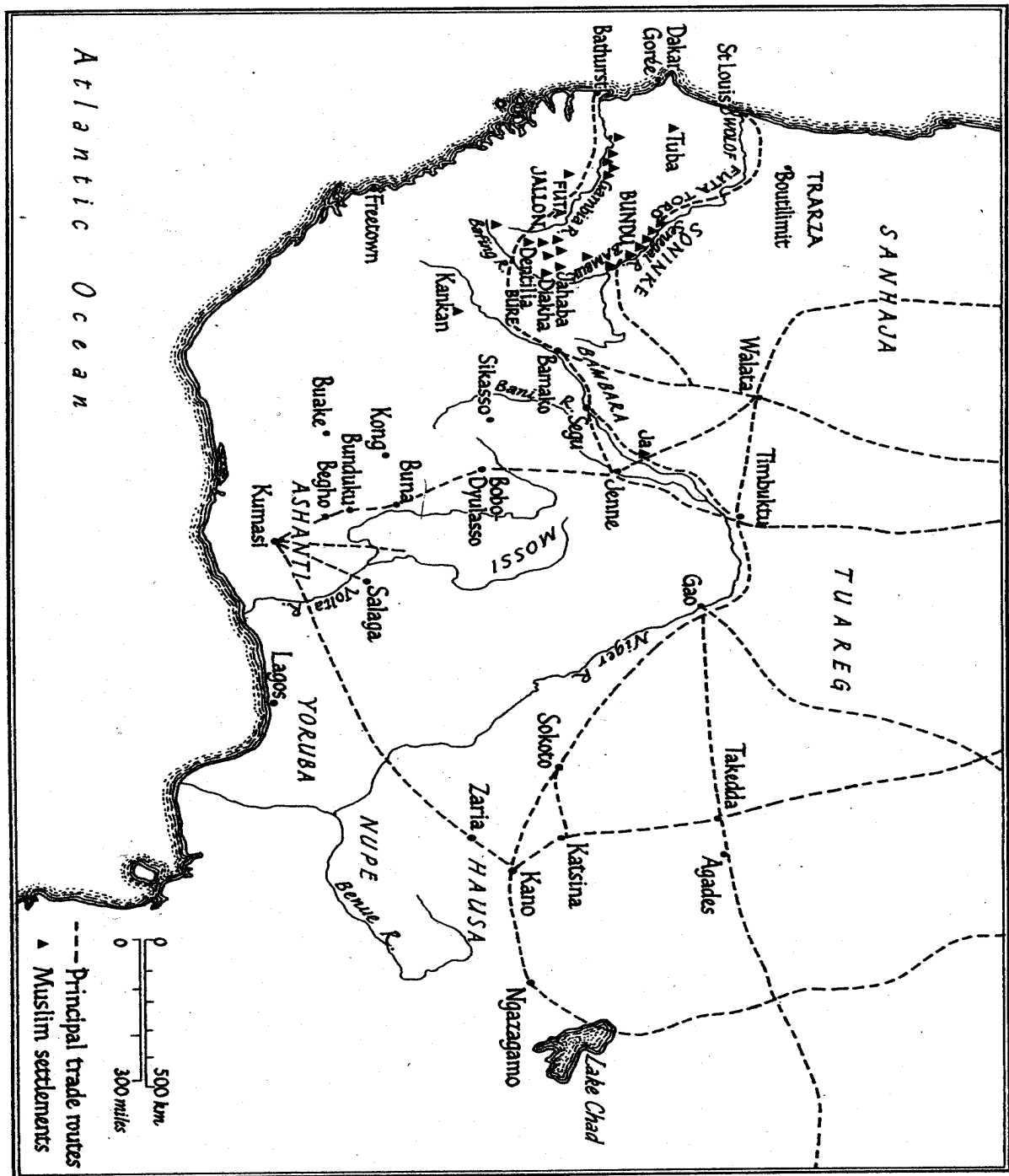
2. Source: Ifor Leslie Evans, *The British in Tropical Africa, an Historical Outline*, (Negro University Press, 1969), 111. "Sketch Map of the Gold Coast, Ashanti, and Northern Territories."



3. Source: Nehemiah Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa: The Study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the Pre-Colonial Period* (Oxford University Press, 1968), 2. "Routes of the Volta Basin."



4. Source: Carola Lentz, *Ethnicity and the Making of History in Northern Ghana*, (Edinburgh University Press, Ltd., 2006), 54. "Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, Provinces and Districts, 1907."



Source: Ira Marvin Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Cambridge: University Press, 2002), 412. "Trade settlements, and the diffusion of Islam in West Africa, 1500-1900." Notice that this contemporary source does not list Salaga, the Gonja capital, as a Muslim settlement.

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